

Performing Arts Organizations’ Communication Through Posters in Greece: A Semiotic Approach

Maria Koloka, Hellenic Open University, Greece

Eirini Papadaki, University of Ioannina, Greece*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6971-5619>

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an analysis of a sample of Greek cultural organizations’ visual messages as polysemiotic, multimodal signs, in an attempt to examine the role of such messages for the communication strategy of cultural organizations. The sample constitutes visual messages from three Greek cultural organizations, each representing a different type of performing art. These organizations are Greek National Theatre, the National Opera of Greece, and the International Short Film Festival in Drama. All messages included in the study are messages promoting specific cultural events and, simultaneously, the organization as a brand. Through morphological and semiotic analysis of the respective messages of the selected organizations, a series of issues are going to be examined, including the way cultural organizations’ messages are composed and projected, their relevance to the specific organization, and the impact of messages both in promoting a cultural event and the organization’s brand, as well as maintaining and developing an organization’s audience.

KEYWORDS

Advertising Culture, Cultural Organizations, International Short Film Festival in Drama, Promotional Messages, National Opera of Greece, National Theatre of Greece, Semiotics, Visual Messages

INTRODUCTION

The cultural organizations that were selected to be included in this study are historical institutions in the Greek cultural scene and have earned international recognition for the work they produce. The reasons for their selection are their status as big brand names in the Greek contemporary cultural setting—as a result of being under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Culture and named “national”-, their successful communication strategy and the big impact their cultural, educative and/or social activities have on Greek audiences. The specific cultural organizations are among the key institutions that shape the performing arts scenery in contemporary Greece. They were chosen to cover a big range of mainly visual performing arts, from theater, opera and ballet dance, to film.

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*Corresponding Author

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To be more specific, this paper examines a selection of posters produced by the National Theater of Greece, the National Opera and the International Short Film Festival of Drama. The National Theatre of Greece was built in a central part of Athens in 1891 based on the designs of the well-known Austrian architect Ernst Ziller, as the first National Scene in Greece. Since its establishment it has hosted many important theater plays, with well-known and much-admired artists such as Maria Callas, Katina Paxinou, Melina Mercouri, etc. Nowadays it houses a Drama School, an International Laboratory of Ancient Drama, a Teacher Training Academy, as well as workshops for children, adolescents and adults. Its' main aim is to educate its audiences in relation to performing arts and strengthen, through theatrical art, their spiritual cultivation. The National Opera was founded in 1939 as part of the Royal Theatre. Its mission is to offer to Greek and foreign audiences high quality performances of operas, operettas, ballets, children's operas, recitals, etc. It houses a professional dance school, as well as educational programs aimed at all age groups. The repertoire of the only national Lyric Theatre in Greece covers four centuries of lyric art, from works by Monteverdi to contemporary Greek authors. Finally, the International Short Film Festival of Drama has been an annual meeting place for filmmakers and industry professionals since 1978. The festival is Europe's leading Greek and southeastern gateway to the world's most prestigious Short Film Awards, and nominated directors qualify to participate in the European Film Awards.

The aim of this paper is to examine the role of posters as communication channels between a cultural organization and its audiences, but also as signs themselves. Therefore, three vital elements of the communication process will be analyzed: the senders of the messages (namely the cultural organizations' scope and will of their main actors), the posters' messages (the semiotic systems used), as well as the role of the reader in the interpretation process. The methodological tools used include interviews with the communication officers of the organizations (the senders), the semiotic analysis of the posters themselves (the messages) and the audience reception (the receivers, through onsite ethnographic research). The main research questions of the study are:

- What kind of semiotic systems do performing arts' organizations mainly use?
- What is the role of posters in the communication strategy of a cultural organization regarding both the communication with its audiences and the creation/strengthening of its brand?
- Are there common formulas used among performing arts' organizations?
- What kind of audiences do posters attract: the organizations' audiences exclusively or the curious minds of general audience?

Cultural Organizations' Messages

In recent decades, the rapid development of the Internet, the appearance of highly interactive and even immersive digital cultural experiences online, and global economic recession, which brought drastic cuts in funds, including in the cultural sector, have redefined the role and services of cultural organizations (Bernstein 2007, Howes 2007, Russo 2011, Gu 2012, Kavoura & Sylaiou 2018). Cultural organizations have nowadays adopted a human-centered communication model, emphasizing the need for the audience to participate in highly engaging and rich cultural experiences, rather than product-oriented communication strategies (Hill et al 2003). The receivers of cultural organizations' messages are co-producers of meaning, stakeholders, with whom the organizations thrive to create strong bonds, long-lasting relationships and constant interaction (Sifaki, 2015). We should note here, that cultural goods and services entail self-worth, an end in themselves and therefore cultural organizations can only be perceived as mediators between artists/cultural producers and the various audiences (Hirschman 1993, Colbert et al 1994 in Hill et al. 2003, p. 3). Following the above, the messages produced by cultural organizations are complex communication signs.

In order to be effective as communication initiatives, the messages produced are made by expert graphic designers, appear to be extremely creative and aim to attract the gazes of every passerby, be it

in the streets of a city or in the digital environment of cultural organizations' websites and social media accounts. In a highly competitive and ambiguous field (Bernstein 2007), such as art and culture¹, the messages produced should adequately carry the information, but at the same time be visually interesting, intriguing and engaging, create communication and perception bonds between a cultural creation and the audience, and shape associations around a cultural brand, that could inspire and engage the audience in long-lasting relationships with the organizations. Most importantly for our study, such messages are multimodal semiotic entities -including at least two semiotic systems: a linguistic and a pictorial one- and have two functions: the promotion of cultural goods and services, on the one hand, and the building or maintenance of a coherent, strong, cultural brand, on the other (Papadaki 2019).

Visual Messages

During the last century, the increase of visual information in all aspects of everyday life and its circulation through the mass and new media has formed the roots of a visual culture, highly criticized by many theorists, such as Bergson, Bataille, Breton, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Foucault, Debord, Baudrillard, Metz, Derrida, Levinas, Jay and many others. Visual messages can be alluring, but also deceptive and even painful (if the Barthesian *punctum*² strikes the viewer). Merleau-Ponty (1964) believed that autonomous visual perception is not possible; only with the help of language can the viewer understand the inner meanings of images.

A typical visual message usually contains three distinct messages: a literal one (perceptual), a symbolic one (cultural), which are corresponding to the two levels of meaning, the Barthesian denotation and connotation, and a linguistic one. This complex structure of the visual message results in what Barthes calls *reading confusion* of the viewer. It is this confusion, however, that acts as a catalyst for understanding the intended message, as it helps connecting the literal to the symbolic and therefore reading the message as a whole (Barthes, 1998, p. 45). The analysis of the visual message moves on two conceptual axes: first, the theoretical conception of the interpretative process in a way that considers both the significance of each form of media and the activity of the audience, and then the understanding of the social relations of interpretative difference in a way that integrates this difference into a broad view of the social structure and social activity (Corner 2001, p. 403). In this case message production conditions, mediation and coding are components that determine the investigation of characteristics, decoding and interpretation of a message (Sifaki 2015, p. 235). Of course, all this given that visual messages are not addressed to passive recipients but to an enlarged, uneven and demanding audience. As stated above, such messages aim at the creation of common communication channels and at the same time foster the active participation of audiences in the communication process.

It is by now made clear that the production and perception of cultural organizations' visual messages are complex procedures that require a lot of research in order to be examined and at a certain extent understood.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper examines specific posters that appeared in the social media accounts of three Greek cultural organizations. Qualitative research methods, namely observation and structured interviews, were chosen as tools for collecting primary sources for this research. For the analysis of the communication messages of the chosen organizations, semiotic analysis was used, based on the writings of Roland Barthes. The aim was to examine the poster sign itself, the semiotic systems used to create and communicate the message, as well as the role of the reader in the interpretation process.

During the survey, information was initially sought from the websites of the chosen cultural organizations. Their history, identity, goals and communication strategy, as well as the legal, social and economic framework in which they operate were of utmost importance for our research, as every message should be examined in relation to its production, distribution and perception goals and

procedures. In addition to that information, we took interviews from the press and communication officers of the organizations, in order to obtain an insider's gaze at the whole communication process. Finally, one of the researchers observed the audience of each organization for certain periods of time (two hours before and one hour after the opening of each performance promoted through the messages studied in this research), taking notes with reactions and comments by the audience. Of course, the note-taking activity stopped the minute all organizations closed following the restrictions imposed due to the covid-19 pandemic.

Thus, methodological triangulation was used to produce data (Mason, 2003, p. 97) with personal observation, interviews and analysis of data collected from web pages and other formal material produced by the organizations, both printed and digital.

CASE STUDIES: NATIONAL THEATRE, THE NATIONAL OPERA OF GREECE AND THE SHORT FILM FESTIVAL OF DRAMA

All the organizations chosen for this study work under the auspices of the Greek state and are highly recognized cultural brands in Greece, each one in a different cultural area. As visual messages produced by museums have been widely studied (Sifaki, 2015), this paper focuses on posters produced by performing arts organizations (theater, opera and film), in an attempt to study the way visual images help an organization to communicate arts that entail sound and motion.

The Posters

For the semiotic analysis, we chose three posters created by three different cultural organizations: the National Theater of Greece, the National Opera of Greece and the Short Film Festival of Drama. The posters were communicated through the organizations' digital media and simultaneously addressed to various types of audiences, from the organizations' regular visitors to a digital passerby or a tourist seeking information before visiting the country. The posters are seen as autonomous messages, produced from the organizations mentioned above, addressed to online audiences and promoting forthcoming cultural events. They are multimodal semiotic systems, comprising both linguistic and pictorial signs, in interaction with other information appearing on the social media accounts of the organizations. They function as pieces of a well-designed puzzle, forming the organizations' communication strategy and sketching its brand (Papadaki 2019).

Semiotic Analysis of the Poster for the Performance "MacBeth", National Theater

For semiologists, the social factors in communication become visible through the study of codes. Codes can be seen as the signs' categorization systems that follow the rules and norms of a specific social setting (Bignell, 1997, p. 10). In advertising, for instance, the dominant codes are large-scale genres, with specific structural elements, always suggesting or even creating a certain kind of interpretation for the receiver. Such messages can be easily read and recognized by a wide audience without needing any kind of education (Fiske, 1992, p. 96). In every advertising image, we can distinguish three messages: a literal iconic, which in semiotic terms can be seen as the denotation, a symbolic iconic, the connotation, and a linguistic message. According to Beasley and Danesi (2010) advertisements "use both verbal and non-verbal techniques to make its message as persuasive as possible".

The message of the poster depicted in Figure 1 is part of a communication act, promoting a theater play. Posters, as every semiotic system, allow every potential viewer the possibility to decode their messages according to his/her personal values, knowledge, experiences, aesthetic choices (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 48) or the "interpretive community" in which he/she stands and the "set of community assumptions" (Fish, 1980) he/she uses to form meaning. Each message, therefore, can lead to innumerable potential meanings, not only due to many individual interpretations, but also because a reader's initial interpretive approach can be reformed later (Noth, 1990, p. 43).

Figure 1.
Macbeth poster (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/EthnikoTheatro/>, Recovery 19/1/2020)



In the specific poster for the performance of “Macbeth”, in the denotative framework-the basic apprehension of the objective present (Barthes, 1988, pp. 50-51)-we notice the visual images of two internationally recognizable objects: a crown and a stiletto. Even though they are not of the same size, they appear in symmetry and they meet at a tangent. These two iconic signs appear on the right part of the poster, in the foreground, as they are meant to attract the gaze of the viewer (Kress & Leeuwen, 2010, pp. 205-206). The interpretation of the messages and the text dynamics, according to Barthes, are subjective. The signs often function autonomously, regardless of their creators’ desires, and they therefore need to be easily recognizable (Halevelaki, 2014, p. 114) and included in Fish’s set of community assumptions. The simpler the signs’ pattern, the clearer the meaning of the message (Halevelaki, 2010, pp. 14-115). The two signs (crown – stiletto) also function as a metaphor, through which the abilities of the two phenomenally irrelevant objects come to a perfect match. They can also be seen as a metonymy, as the viewer comes to complete the poster’s narration with the help of his/her knowledge and previous gazes, in order to decode and understand the message (Eco, 1989, p. 431).

Connotation draws from denotation, to create the symbolic part of the message (Barthes, 1988, p. 51). Thus essentially, denotation sets the outlines, for connotation to give the signs heart and bones, sketching the symbolic meaning, as “*denotation is ultimately what is being photographed, while connotation is how it is photographed*” (Fiske, 1992, pp. 111-112). To put Barthes’ words in posters’ terms, denotation concerns the images and graphics chosen to appear on a poster’s frame, while connotation regards the symbolic meaning each viewer or each interpretive community of viewers read. Signs are governed by polysemy, as their meaning arises not so much from the signs themselves, as from the reading of external codes related to society and its culture, ideas, habits, ideologies, feelings and personal associations, but also from the way that each society uses and evaluates them (Fiske & Hartley, 1978).

This is what Barthes refers to as a “myth”. It works in the connotative level and gives form to the dominant ideology about the conditions of meaning (Barthes, 1979, p. 201). Inside the outline of the crown and the stiletto on the poster we recognize parts of a man’s face. Half of the face is implied, as it lies in the dark, while the other half is a blood-red mask. It is the appearance of this person that attracts the viewer’s interest, thrills and frightens him. The tight mouth of the man, the ruddy, almost transparent eyes with the decisive hard look and the deep wrinkle on the forehead deliberately create fear and emotional tension for the viewer. The combination of the signs on the poster (crown – stiletto – face) act as a syntagma of visual signifiers that interact with each other, tell the story of the

message, the succession of events and foretell the end. King Macbeth's world (the crown declares it) is red. A world of alienated power and fear literally drowned in blood. The stiletto on the poster that intersects the blood-stained crown defines the scene: Macbeth is a tragic figure who was born and lived under the weight of a fate not defined by himself but a witch prophecy. Power, doubt, insecurity, greed, violence and deception lead to the fall of this Sisyphean soul.

The colors on the poster consist another code, which skillfully participates in the emotional tension of the viewer. The background is austere, abstract, in a pale pink. The choice of this color is not random. Pink symbolizes tenderness, innocence and childishness. So, the pictures on the right side come as a shock to the viewer, interrupting the peaceful background with a violent, bloody red and dispelling any mood or intention of forgiveness of *Macbeth's* actions. On a second reading the huge color difference of the poster could indicate the magnitude of the impoverishment of an able General who lived honorably until the moment that his ambition and inability to distinguish good from evil led him to lose his moral compass.

In each poster, the sign that captures the eye is the iconic sign, but the linguistic sign that accompanies the image is equally important. Although the text as a message seems to act parasitically towards the dominant visual message, it is the text that comes to excite or dramatize the image and rein in the viewer's imagination (Barthes, 1988, p. 35). The text has possibilities such as: to produce a completely new signified, to expand the set of connotations already recognized in the image, to clarify the image so as to reduce interpretations that are far from the intended message and could make reading problematic. As soon as it is perceived, the image is glossed over, and therefore the text functions in a subsidiary way to avoid incorrect linguistic translation (Barthes, 1988, p. 38). The linguistic message reduces the polysemy of the image and immobilizes the uncertainty of the signifiers. This is what Barthes (1988, p. 48) describes as "anchorage". The words help, through a denoted description, a title or a caption of the image clarify the intended message.

The linguistic message of Macbeth's poster is abstract and gives little information on what it depicts. At the upper left end of the poster in classic bold black font we see the duration of the performance (7.2 – 8.3) at the National Theatre and below the dates (12.3 – 12.4) that the performance will be presented at the Municipal Theatre of Piraeus. At the center of the upper part of the poster there is only the name of the director (ΔΗΜΗΤΡΗΣ ΛΙΓΝΑΔΗΣ). The top zone of the poster avoids noise, tension and anything unnecessary. On the left lower edge of the poster the name of the author (ΟΥΛΙΑΜ ΣΑΙΞΠΗΡ) follows the logic of the upper part. On the contrary, the title of the show (ΜΑΚΒΕΘ) is written in a visibly larger font, in complete harmony with the image: outline and bright red interior. The classic font of the poster gives a sense of security and regularity, while the font of the title conveys the emotional weight of the picture.

Seeing the poster as a single whole, we realize that it is characterized by what Van Leeuwen and Kress call multimodality, which is an important parameter in the interpretative process of each message (Chondolidou, 1999, pp. 115-117). The message of the poster, consisting of both an iconic and a linguistic semiotic system, creates associations in the viewer's mind both in terms of its recognition and in terms of understanding its meaning. (table 1) The text may be complementary, but it is a structural-organic element of the message.

In terms of perception, the message on the poster can only be recognized and perceived in its entirety by a few viewers, who know the storyline or have seen the performance before. This characteristic is called entropy (low predictability) of the poster's message (Fiske, 1992, p. 18). It is a "high resolution" message, it has a complex encoding, and therefore its content is not instantly recognized and accepted (Gofmann, 1979, p. 154).

Semiotic Analysis of the Poster for the Performance "Votsek", National Opera of Greece

The poster of the Votsek opera (fig.2) also consists of both an iconic and a linguistic semiotic system. In this case the linguistic message is in the middle of the poster. In white capital letters, large font

Table 1.
Synoptic analysis of the poster's message

Semiotic systems	iconic, linguistic
Denotation	crown, stiletto
Connotation	internal part of the crown & the stiletto
Linguistic message	anchorage, helps towards connotation, negates the polysemy of the message
Color	pink, red, black
Entropy	low predictability
Myth	Macbeth = king, crown-blood-death
“High resolution” encoding	the viewer needs time to connote the message
syntagma of visual signifieds	crown-stiletto-blood-dark
Metaphor	crown-stiletto-blood-darkness
Metonymy	the title of the play (outline with red inside).

Figure 2.
Votsek Opera's Poster (Source: <https://www.nationalopera.gr/>. Retrieved 2/2/2020)



and bold script we see at the center of the poster the title of the work: BOTSEK and to the right, in smaller calligraphic font, so as not to confuse the viewer, in small white letters the name of the author: Αλμπαν Μπεργκ. The text with the title of the work is structurally placed between the image, essentially resting on the bottom without however hiding it. On the left side of the title, above and below it, in smaller uppercase white letters we see the words: NEOS and ΓΕΝΝΙΕΤΑΙ respectively. So, the title seems to be: NEOS BOTSEK ΓΕΝΝΙΕΤΑΙ (new VOTSEK is born). However, this appears to be a wordplay, as the National Opera of Greece’s slogan for the years 2019-2020 is “*born in the National Opera*”, (Valergas³, personal communication, January 17, 2020).

The way the title is quoted (between the image) helps the viewer instantly perceive the promoted message and automatically leads to a connection of the title with the image (Kapaxidi, 2014, p. 35). At the center of the lower part of the poster there is information about the dates of the performances in capital bold white letters: 19, 23, 30, 31 Jan. 2020 and 2 Feb 2020 and just below, in a much smaller white capital font, reference is made to the venue of the performances and the institution: ΑΙΘΟΥΣΑ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΝΙΑΡΧΟΣ ΕΘΝΙΚΗΣ ΛΥΡΙΚΗΣ ΣΚΗΝΗΣ – ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΥ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΝΙΑΡΧΟΣ. It seems that the linguistic message was organized, both content and form,

in a concise and clear way, so that the identity of the work is stressed, as an element that will arouse the interest of the viewer and will prompt him to watch the performance. The text is complementary to the image, but its position on the poster is crucial, as its design and content prioritize the meaning of the words of the message.

For the background of the poster, the gray color has been chosen, which, however, in the center is lighter and deepens at both ends. The choices of color on a poster help the viewers understand its semantic levels. In this case, gray belongs to the cold and neutral colors, it is between black and white. Its excessive use in the poster creates a feeling of depression and pessimism that leads us to the conclusion that the message straddles between darkness and light (Halevelaki, 2010, p. 47). The choice of white, a cold color, for the entire verbal message, is another attempt to make the feeling of emptiness and futility, that the message attempts to project, clear.

At the center of the poster, in the iconic message, we can see a man's sunburned hand holding a knife. The arm is shown to the elbow; the man appears to be wearing a worn, military uniform and he slits the poster with the knife in a horizontal incision with surgical precision. The tight grip of the hand on the knife indicates determination but also despair, while the blade of the knife glistens under a strong and harsh light. The symbols of the image (hand-knife) are perfectly connected with the linguistic message of the poster since the name *BOTSEK* is inextricably linked with murder. The iconic representations and signs convey a visual set and refer to the signified. If the linguistic message was missing, the signs of the iconic message could produce a completely different meaning than the intended one. We therefore recognize Barthes' anchorage, that is to say the help of the linguistic message to fill any gaps left by the image (Sifaki, 2015, p. 242). The linguistic message of the poster, and especially the title, provides narrative information of the performance that the image alone could not give (Halevelaki, 2010, p. 20). The elements of denotation on the poster mark the literal level of meaning (hand-knife), while connotation translates the iconic signs not only on the level of what our senses recognize (what is said), but also on the form of the message, (how it is said). (Fiske, 2010, pp. 98-99). The sunburned, suffering hand emits a strength, a determination but also a despair. It is the helplessness of a man who cannot master his life. A soldier who fought for ideals nobody else believes. The disappointment from the betrayal of the woman he loved, the sneer of the surrounding, the wounded selfishness and the impasse that make his thought go astray in labyrinthine paths. The peace and quiet of his life resembling the flat surface of the poster are disturbed. The trap is set. *Votsek* is falling apart. In his darkened mind, killing his wife is a one-way street. The knife lies tightly grasped in his hand and in a moment of insanity tears the female body. He regrets it, immediately after the act. On the poster, the knife has been cleared by the blood in the waters of the lake. Its tip symbolically touches the name of the hero and foreshadows the end. *Votsek* seeks redemption from a world that does not understand him, and the knife is the object he sees as the solution to his problem.

The specific message is an entropic message with low predictability, since the emotional and aesthetic understanding of the visual message is not one-dimensional (Fiske, 1992, p. 24) and needs knowledge of the play's narrative in order for the semiotic syntagma to be clearly perceived (table 2).

Semiotic Analysis of the Poster for the 42nd Short Film Festival of Drama

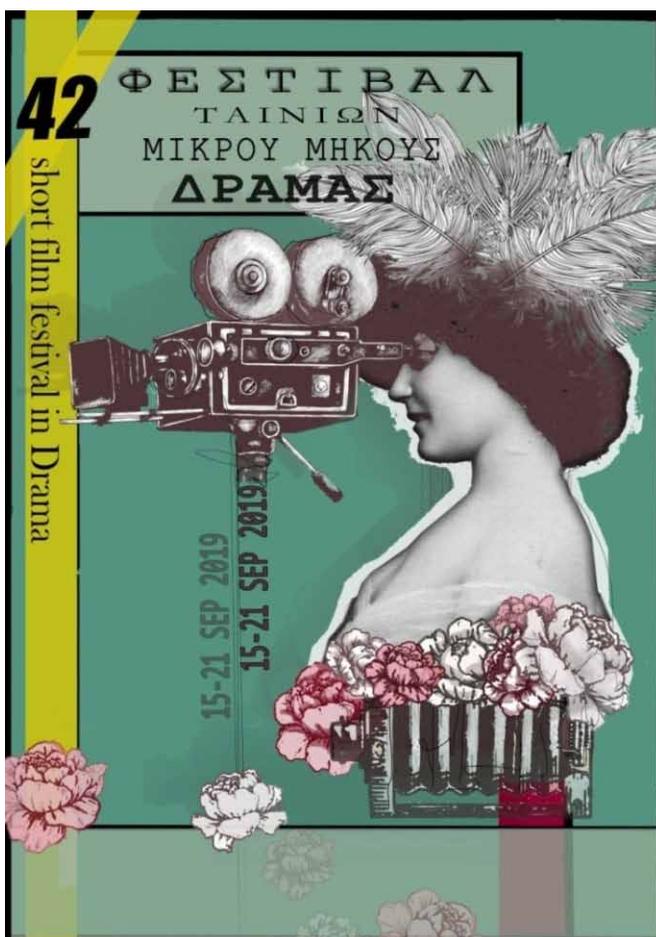
The aesthetics of a poster reflect the aesthetics and identity of the organization but need to comply with the aesthetics of the audience, as well (Skoura & Glytsi, 2003, p. 307). In this sense the poster of the 42nd Short Film Festival of Drama (fig.3), designed by the artist Sofia Paraskevopoulou, with the technique of collage, tries to outline the identity of all parties involved (Paraskevopoulou, personal communication, February 12, 2020).

The poster of the 42nd Short Film Festival of Drama, as the two posters analyzed above, includes a linguistic and a pictorial message. The linguistic message is divided into three zones. Two on the vertical axis of the poster and one on the horizontal. On the left axis of the poster, with the use of black, bold letters and large font, the title of the event is stated. On the left vertical axis, in black calligraphic lowercase font, the title is repeated in English (short film festival in Drama). The second

Table 2.
Brief semiotic message analysis of “Votsek” poster

Semiotic systems	iconic, linguistic
Denotation	hand – knife
Connotation	hand – knife – murder – death
Linguistic message	anchorage, helps towards connotation, negates the polysemy of the message
Color	grey, white
Entropy	little predictability
Myth	disappointment – betrayal = violence – death
“High resolution” encoding	the viewer needs time for perception
syntagma of visual signifieds	hand – knife – death – catharsis
Metaphor	Hand – knife – death – solution
Metonymy	ΒΟΤΣΕΚ

Figure 3.
Poster of the 42nd Short Film Festival of Drama (Source: <https://www.dramafilmfestival.gr/olderposters.html>. Retrieved 12/2/2020)



vertical axis, parallel to the first and approximately in the middle of the poster, announces the dates of the festival with two different combinations around the axis. At the left part of the axis with light uppercase font the dates 15-21-SEP 2019 appear, while the same information is seen at the right part of the axis, with bold black font and at a higher level of the poster. On the top of the poster, the horizontal zone of the linguistic message stands out by its large size and its conflict with the image of the poster. In this zone, we see the message in Greek: “ΦΕΣΤΙΒΑΛ ΤΑΙΝΙΩΝ ΜΙΚΡΟΥ ΜΗΚΟΥΣ ΔΡΑΜΑΣ”. The message comes to play with the black color and font size, as the words ΦΕΣΤΙΒΑΛ and ΔΡΑΜΑΣ are in a clearly larger font and more strongly accented. The use of English indicates the international character of the event. The organization of the linguistic message highlights syntagmatic relations since the quotation form narrates the intentions of the author (Streeter, 2006). Finally, the language message “anchors” the meaning, as its absence would possibly lead some of the receivers to misinterpretation (Sifaki, 2015, p. 242).

As far as color is concerned, the poster has a shade of blue as a background, petrol in specific, according to the designer and visual artist Mrs. Paraskevopoulou (Paraskevopoulou, personal communication, February 12, 2020), while yellow, black, white, red and pink are also distinguished on its surface. As each color is assigned a content, the colors act as symbols (Halevelaki, 2010, p. 149). Thus, the shade of blue, a calm color, signals the credibility and trust that the festival wishes to be associated with. Yellow is immediately visible, attractive and associated with warmth and positive thinking. White alludes to balance, innocence and sincerity, pink to femininity and romance, and red to vivacity and passion. Finally, black is a classic, constant value as it gives a note of seriousness and tradition (Zotos, 2000, p. 219). The colors of the poster are metonymically associated with the woman-cinema relationship, through a setting that implies romance, tenderness and a sweet melancholy (Dyer, 2004, p. 136).

Regarding the pictorial semiotic system of the poster (table 3), we recognize the Barthesian denotation of a film camera that alludes to early 20th century technology and the body of a woman depicted from the waist up. The woman gazes at the film lens and looks ready to take shots. The clothes (tight dress with accentuated the deep bodice with an edging of flowers around it, the hat with feathers) are elements that draw to a woman of the interwar. Regarding connotation, and given that signification comes from the recognition of external codes related to culture and society (ideas, mentalities, habits, etc.) by the viewer (Fiske, 1978), we understand the creator’s intention to highlight the contribution of women filmmakers in the history of film. It is a message that attempts to break taboos, to awaken women and all those involved in the film industry. The codes of the message are

Table 3.
Brief semiotic message analysis of Short Film Festival of Drama

Semiotic systems	linguistic, iconic
Denotation	camera - woman
Connotation	Camera – woman = women filmmakers
Linguistic message	title of the event, anchorage
Color	symbolism of yellow, black, pink, red, blue, white
Entropy	high predictability
Myth	woman and film
“Low resolution” encoding	the viewer does not need time for perception
syntagma of visual signifieds	camera - woman
Metaphor	the delicate woman – the dynamic woman
Metonymy	the woman of yesterday is the woman of today

long-range, that is, they systematize signs that are recognizable by the wide audience (Williamson, 1978, p. 91) and so it is a “low resolution” message in decoding, since it is easily perceived (Hawkins, & Hoch, 1992, p. 214). The woman on the poster is feminine, has artistic concerns, reaches to our days and seeks her place in a world beyond stereotypes or myths.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this paper, three posters produced by three cultural organizations of Greece (namely: National Theatre, National Opera and Short Film Festival of Drama) were semiotically examined. The selection of these organizations was based on the scope of their activities, their brand name, their many years of experience in organizing cultural events and the authors’ intention to study a wide circle of performing arts organizations. Each communicative message was examined as an ideological and semantic entity. Thus, a comparative analysis of the selected messages should give us an idea about the general characteristics of Greek performing arts organizations’ promotional messages on posters.

All the organizations we studied have the privilege of having strong brand names. All of them have demonstrated long, successful courses in the cultural map of the country. They have a loyal audience that follows and monitors their actions and development. The results of the research we conducted on cultural organizations’ premises showed that such communication messages as posters are perceived, by a vast number of the audience, more as an announcement or a reminder of an event and less as a communication act that needs decoding. The discussions with the audience showed that cultural messages do not communicate only a specific event, but also the work and the dynamics of the organizations. Thus, 70% of the respondents expressed the view that the brand name works as an additional guarantee for both the successful aesthetic presentation of the messages and the quality of the event. If one adds to the above the opinions of the communication managers of the cultural organizations, as they arise from the interviews conducted, we will see that messages and brand name work in an interrelated way in the consciousness of both existing and potential audiences.

Cultural organizations’ messages always include images, either photographic or graphic. The recipient of such visual messages must fill in the semantic gaps, choose the connotation he prefers, while he can give the message different interpretations every time he approaches it (Eco, 1989, p. 425), as posters are flexible systems of signification. All posters examined are multimodal and use the combination of two semantic systems—a pictorial and a linguistic one—and many codes. Codes are systems of sign organization, determined by standards of social consensus. In the specific case study all the posters’ messages entail long-range codes, readable by a wide audience. These are images that are easily recognizable by the viewers and have multidimensional role in the message. This is because images are widely used nowadays as vehicles of signification. In all the examples studied, we can easily distinguish sign denotation (for example: hand, knife, camera), the symbolic use of such signs, guided by social associations (for example: red-darkness = blood-death), that help towards connotation (for example: red-darkness=blood – death + knife=murder). The images also convey social and cultural values and in their interaction with the receiver and his social culture, are transformed into beliefs or opinions before they eventually become myths (for example: disappointment, betrayal). In the messages, the analysis showed that images also create syntagmata of visual signifiers since the way they interact creates familiar cultural narratives with a predictable ending (for example: crown-stiletto-blood = power-murder-death). Finally, images act as metaphors, since they present an idea in a formative way (for example: stiletto-blood). They also function as metonymies, as in the case of the Short Film Festival of Drama message, since the woman on the poster was used to express a whole genre, that is, all women in the world.

There is, however, a semantic gap, that only a small audience can fill in: the way the synergy of the multiple signs sketches a very specific signification. Only the frequent visitors of each specific organization or the fans of the performing art each organization serves, can successfully connect the dots and read the full story. It might be possible for a wide range of audiences to perceive certain

poster narratives through social and cultural associations, but it is only the initiate permanent theater and opera audiences, Shakespeare’s and Berg’s fans that can read Macbeth’s curse and Votsek’s drowning respectively, behind the signs on the posters.

It is important to point out that there are no logos on the posters studied. This seems to be a conscious choice, stemming from the fact that the specific organizations are all easily recognizable brand names in the Greek cultural scene, as well as the need to stress only the essential information, avoiding anything unnecessary.

The color code of the messages contains the symbolisms sketched by the social and cultural data of the time they were created, as well as the cultural norms of their receivers. Thus, through the analysis it became evident that color symbolism stimulated emotions and shaped signification (for example red = blood, yellow = joy, white = honesty, black = darkness, etc.).

The linguistic semantic systems of all messages have common features, such as guiding towards meaning, mimicking image qualities and the lack of verb types. Linguistic signs appear in play with the posters’ images, they function as images by themselves. They are also similar in appearance: large fonts, bold letters, no calligraphic writing. Certain emphatic elements, such as size, add to the emotional charge of the receiver and contribute to signification. The linguistic messages offer simple and understandable information and act as a Barthesian anchorage, making things clear, or at least clearer, for the viewers.

Concluding this comparative analysis of the messages, we should mention that two of them (National Theatre, National Opera) use entropy, meaning low predictability and high resolution, coding, as the receiver needs time to read the message, while the message from Short Film Festival of Drama use high predictability and low-resolution coding since the receiver can perceive the message quite easily. This might be explained by the fact that the film industry has wider and more diverse audiences in Greece than theater and opera, and therefore filmic codes are recognizable by a larger number of people.

The semiotic tools of the above analysis are listed in the summary in table 4.

Table 4.
Summary of semiotics tools of messages

Semiotics tools	National Theatre	National Opera	Short Film Festival of Drama
Semantic systems	iconic, linguistic	iconic, linguistic	iconic, linguistic
Symbolisms	image, color	image, color	image, color
Denotation	iconic signs, words	iconic signs, words	iconic signs, words
Connotation	combination of images, linguistic message, socio-cultural background	combination of images, linguistic message, socio-cultural background	combination of images, linguistic message, socio-cultural background
Linguistic message	anchorage	anchorage	anchorage
Entropy	✓	✓	-
Adundance	-	-	✓
“Myth”	social reading of images, cultural power	social reading of images, cultural power	social reading of images, cultural power
Encoding “low resolution”	-	-	✓
Encoding “high resolution”	✓	✓	-
Syntagmata of visual signifiers	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual
Metaphor	✓	✓	✓
Metonymy	✓	✓	✓

The research showed that the choice of messages, in all cultural organizations examined, is based on artistic and aesthetic criteria. Both National Theatre and National Opera have a creative department that in collaboration with each artistic director gives the direction regarding communication policy. As far as the Short Film Festival of Drama is concerned, its main communication medium is the poster, which emerges after an open competition every year, around the festival's dates. The visual design of the poster should aim at the promotion of short film art, in an original way and with the use of various applications, bearing in mind the international dimension of the festival.

A common policy of cultural organizations through their communicative strategy is to promote innovation, stress their brand identity and form the basis for a dialectical interaction with their audiences. All organizations have chosen the composition of multimodal messages, the combination of iconic and linguistic signs, with strong symbolism but flexibility in interpretation, so as to address many audience groups.

The aesthetics of the messages is also crucial: posters should be both attractive and original, with a distinct aesthetic stigma of its producer. Posters mirror the identity brands of the organizations that produce them. Through such messages, cultural organizations stress their aesthetics, openness, differentiation, the balance between classic and contemporary, their unique perspective on cultural events. Posters can therefore be seen as the organizations' initiation of a dialogue with various audiences.

The aesthetic choices and the different visual approaches of cultural messages often produce a new visual proposal that is surprising, tense, puzzling or perplexing to the receivers. Sometimes the message is easily readable and sometimes it is implied. However, messages should be accepted as vehicles for the expression of special artistic, cultural and social ideas. So, the effectiveness of a message is rather subjective. According to the research, the National Theatre does not address a specific audience, but its communicative strategy is considered successful, as its events are sold-out. Its audience includes groups of people with different social, economic, cultural, educational and age characteristics. National Opera's messages are considered highly effective to a specific kind of audience, according to its communication officer Mr. Valergas, basically 'high aesthetics' audience, which mainly attends ballet and opera performances in Greece. The messages of the Short Film Festival of Drama, on the other hand, are considered effective for all audiences engaged in the production and dissemination of movies and also movie fans.

Thus, the effectiveness of a message is not a mathematically measurable concept, but depends on cultural and aesthetic criteria. Each connotation needs certain cultural experience, similar to Bourdieu's notion of habitus, consisting of knowledge, attitudes and skills (knowledge, predispositions, educational skills and qualifications, cultural knowledge, sensitivities, but also ways of thinking and expression), each individual has formed in the context of his family, education or life path. The frequency of visits to theatres and museums or listening to classical music is among the factors that shapes one's habitus, according to Bourdieu (Patereka, 1986, p. 10). Following the same logic, the effectiveness of a message may depend on what Fish defines as "interpretive communities." Fish explains that the production of meaning is socially and historically determined, therefore signification is not shaped by the individual receiver, but by the interpretive community in which the receiver belongs (Fish, 1980, p. 27). Hochberg's (1964) recollection of past cultural gazes as well as the myths (Barthes 1979) and aspect-blindness⁴ (Wittgenstein 1953) that certain cultural industries generate and widely circulate are also relevant here.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research has brought to surface some thoughts, concerning the semiotic analysis of cultural organizations' messages. It has been shown that promotional posters are multimodal semiotic systems, using specific semiotic systems, namely pictorial and linguistic signs. They use creative graphic design, along with images and text. All elements on a poster, even linguistic messages, can

acquire pictorial characteristics. Definitely, images are the dominant semiotic system, the common formula between performing arts' organizations, but language is also important, not only as a caption, but as an anchorage guiding towards signification. Cultural organizations try to use widely recognizable signs and codes, so that their messages are perceived by all possible readers, but at the same time they give the information in an abstract way, so that the audience would try to fill in the gaps, producing multiple significations. This procedure praises the "knowers", the permanent organizations' audiences, creating feelings of community and belonging.

The posters' role is to communicate a message and at the same time enrich and strengthen the organization's brand. Therefore, the posters' role is crucial in the communication strategy of each organization. The posters' visual messages can be analyzed as autonomous semiotic entities and by using specific visual syntagmata, they can start an intellectual dialogue with all groups of audiences, both the organizations' permanent audiences that search for the organizations' messages and general audiences that accidentally see the posters. Each group is given the flexibility to find the significations that match their aspirations, needs, knowledge, experiences, habitus. In this sense, the posters' viewers co-produce meaning while reading the messages on the posters and form assumptions on the promoted event and associations sketching the organization's brand. The posters' messages can therefore be seen as personalized, the perception depending on the knowledge and past experiences of each viewer. A full perception is therefore possible only for the usual arts performances' goers, who are familiar with the performances' storylines and can therefore recognize and read all the meaning-making resources used on the posters.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The characteristics of cultural goods and services [their intangible nature, the fact that they are consumed the very instant they are produced, the uniqueness of each cultural experience and their non-stockable character (Bateson & Hoffman 1999)] make their communication a very challenging task for organizations.
- ² Punctum is the word Barthes uses to describe the wound, the shock that occurs to the receiver of the message when he/she realizes that something familiar, connected to personal memories or information is depicted to the image he/she is gazing at (Barthes 1982:26-27).
- ³ Communications director of National Opera.
- ⁴ The term “aspect-blindness” was proposed by Wittgenstein in order to stress the fact that some people fail to see certain aspects of visual stimuli, due to lack of knowledge, experience or understanding.

Maria Koloka has a BA (ptychion) in Folklore Studies from the University of Thrace and a BA (ptychion) in Greek culture from the Hellenic Open University. She has an MSc in Adult Education from the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and a MSc in the Management of Cultural Units from Hellenic Open University. Her research interests focus on cultural communication, the semiotics of the image and the mediation of culture through mass media.

Eirini Papadaki studied Journalism and Mass Media Communication at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She submitted her PhD thesis at the University of Kent at Canterbury, Great Britain. She was scientific responsible for two projects of the Chamber of Fine Arts of Greece/Greek Ministry of Culture. She has taught at the University of Kent at Canterbury (School of Drama, Film and Visual Arts) and various Greek universities. She has published articles in scientific journals, she has written chapters in books and has presented papers in many conferences worldwide. She has also edited the collective volume “Cultural Industries and Technoculture: Practices and Challenges”, in cooperation with Aspasia Theodosiou. Today she works as an assistant professor at the Department of Music Studies at the University of Ioannina. Her research interests include cultural communication, cultural management, semiotics of the image, cultural industries, branding, technoculture, as well as mediation practices (mass and new media).