

Case Report

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GRAPHIC DESIGN – A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION THROUGH SYMBOLS

Design gráfico - um meio de comunicação através de símbolos**KRASIMIRA DRUMEVA¹**Principal Investigator
ORCID: 0000-0003-2551-9848¹ St. Cyril and St. Methodius University, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria**ABSTRACT**

In the genesis of his existence, man had an experiential need to explore the world around and to communicate with his fellows in order to survive and continue the kin. The need for social connections provoked the development and improvement of verbal and non-verbal communication. All the knowledge of humanity is transmitted and stored through language, writing, behaviour and images. Due to the specific nature of human perceptions, non-verbal means of interaction are much more effective and natural. For these reasons, graphic design, as a means of visual communication, widely applies a non-verbal presentation of content through images and symbols to reach a wide audience. This article aims to explore the application of images, which already carry much more complex meanings, in the process of sharing information. The focus of research is the process of interaction between the images applied in graphic design and the context, and their transformation into symbols. The article explores the interpretation of symbols, which are given much more qualitative characteristics in order to build on new ideas that the process of content visualization requires.

RESUMO

Na génese da sua existência, o ser humano sentia uma necessidade experiencial de explorar o mundo que o rodeava e de comunicar com os seus semelhantes para sobreviver e garantir a continuidade da família. A necessidade de estabelecer ligações sociais levou ao desenvolvimento e aperfeiçoamento da comunicação verbal e não verbal. Todo o conhecimento da humanidade é transmitido e armazenado através da linguagem, da escrita, do comportamento e das imagens. Devido à natureza específica das percepções humanas, os meios não verbais de interação revelam-se muito mais eficazes e naturais. Por estas razões, o design gráfico, enquanto meio de comunicação visual, recorre amplamente à apresentação não verbal de conteúdos através de imagens e símbolos, com o intuito de alcançar um público alargado. Este artigo tem como objectivo explorar a aplicação de imagens – que, por si só, transportam significados bastante mais complexos – no processo de partilha de informação. O foco da investigação é o processo de interação entre as imagens utilizadas no design gráfico e o contexto, e a sua consequente transformação em símbolos. O artigo analisa ainda a interpretação desses símbolos, que adquirem características mais qualitativas, contribuindo para o desenvolvimento de novas ideias exigidas pelo processo de visualização de conteúdos.

KEYWORDS

Graphic Design, Visual Communication, Image, Symbol, Poster.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Design Gráfico, Comunicação Visual, Imagem, Símbolo, Cartaz.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the evolution of communication, it is increasingly realized that symbols are a means of transmitting, storing and processing information in the process of social coexistence. As Todor Berov notes in his work "Semeiotics of Art", it involves also the interaction, the reaction and the behaviour of the participants, which are determined by the received signals of verbal and non-verbal content. These signals are signs, symbols and images that are represented by sounds, colours, shapes, etc. In this sense, the sign functions in communication are performed not only by spoken words, but also by facial expressions, gestures, movements and the situation itself (Berov, 2000, p. 71-72). The symbol reveals wide and deep aspects of the surrounding world, becoming one of the main tools for acquiring knowledge. Images and symbols are not sporadic creations of consciousness, they satisfy the need to reveal the most hidden qualities of the being (Eliade, 1991, p. 10). Berov defines art as knowledge and aesthetics, however, unlike science, the subject of its studies are not the physical manifestations of things, but the spiritual and emotional world. Since human nature is boundless and elusive to exact definitions, the formulation of human knowledge is interpreted in even broader and subjective forms by using the imagination (Berov, 2000, p. 93). Based on these conclusions, an analogy can be drawn with design, which has much more in common with creativity than with business. Therefore, it can be argued that graphic design is knowledge of the world around us. It emerges because of people's need to communicate and express themselves, to visualize their ideas and needs through images.

Exploring the essence and the application of the symbol in the social life of man, we come across several terms that are used – image, sign and symbol. For the purpose of further theoretical justification, it is necessary to clarify some important aspects in this regard. The sign is considered as an indication, meaning, content of the visual language. Its meanings are literal and not influenced by context and interaction with other signs. Its purpose is to facilitate communication at its primary level. The study of the symbol and the image reveals complex combinations of interrelationships, which visualize ideas, notions and thoughts. They constitute a complex model that combines existential, social, emotional, intellectual accumulations into an intricate synthesis of transformations (Bruce-Mitford, 2019). The image is the author's subjective interpretation, which is adequate and created for a specific situation. The symbol comprises the multicultural understanding of concepts in a wide range. Looking at the visual communication of our time, we can identify problems related to the huge volume of "visual noise" that is generated. In their everyday social life, people are attacked by information, the greater part of which is intrusive and unnecessary. As a result, a protective mechanism is applied, which leads to ignoring all random messages. This makes them invulnerable to modern marketing of huge audiences on a global scale. Because of this negative trend, these conflict zones need to be explored in order to be able to implement mechanisms for personalization of the content, aestheticization of the social environment and sustainable practices for sharing valuable ideas. This article will consider the symbol as an object in modern visual communication in order to define and synthesize it according to its meaning in communication. The subject of research is the process of interaction between the images applied in graphic design and the context, and their transformation into symbols.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main method for collecting data in this article is the qualitative study of posters published from 1995 to 2022 in the 10 consecutive editions of the catalogue of the International Triennial of Stage Poster – Sofia. The method includes research techniques for collection and exploration of descriptive data in the form of a critical analysis of visual, conceptual and aesthetic characteristics. The qualitative study aims to collect practical data that will be used to perform analysis and draw conclusions by using an inductive method.

3. DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTS OF IMAGE AND SYMBOL

Human perceptions include a complex system of receptors that reflect and transmit the received information to the mind. The emotional and intellectual self processes the data to turn it into content. When the viewer perceives this graphic content - the fruit of creative design, it is transformed into an image bearing specific characteristics beyond the external features depicted. As a result, the perceived form acquires a sign structure and a function – to reveal the author's message to the audience (Berov, 2000, pp. 16-17). Hegel treats the artistic image as an expression of the abstract idea in a concrete sensual form (Hegel, 2004). The presence of image reflection in the mind is a prerequisite for the emergence of the perception of a symbol. It can therefore be argued that before something becomes a symbol, it must be an image (Hillman, 1997). Sensory perception of an object and its connection to the spiritual and emotional self of the recipient leads to the emergence of an image in mind. Once it is upgraded with an idea or a concept, the image becomes a symbol. It contains summarized information in a form that is indirectly connected with the implied meaning. Symbols are projections similar to the phenomenon or object, and they affirm the logical interconnectedness between the intellectual and spiritual self of man. (Berov, 2000, p. 288-289)

In graphic design, every detail, line and colour shade seek stylistic unity that is in line with the leading idea. The artistic form of the symbol is treated as an expression of its essence. Symbols do not require depiction of all external features of objects. They use the principle of the unsaid by applying „syntheticity of the figurative solution“ (Georgiev, 2023, p. 76). The simplification of the form is a basic requirement for the content presented in the process of balancing the relations in the system of dialogue between the user and the product (Markova, 2024, p. 2). For this purpose, while creating the symbol, it is necessary to apply an artistic summary, which aims to clear and remove the superfluous elements until a synthesis is achieved. These images are already loaded with very deep meanings that visualize perceptions. These creative incarnations bring aesthetics and meaning to communication.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SYMBOL IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION

As a result of the need for graphic design to present a large volume of content, a specific language is formed for communication with the viewer. In this process, through artistic synthesis, the most important is sifted out and transformed into a visual code of images and symbols. To establish such a language for transmission of information requires an examination of its epistemology. In order to reveal the characteristics of the symbol in advertising design, several main aspects can be defined:

4.1. Communicativeness

The first requirement which should be considered in the application of the symbol in visual communication is to ensure an immediate dialogue with the audience. Design is becoming a unique platform for sharing content between industry and users. Graphic visions are not frozen colourful paintings, self-sufficient and isolated objects of everyday life. Their goal is to attract attention, to present an idea - an opportunity for reflection and action. The images become embedded in the mind and provoke development of new scenarios - a story that continues in subsequent conceptual solutions. The application of semiotics in design should take into account the attitudes of the audience in order to be able to provoke the desire for interaction. This activity is, in the most literal sense, a desire to buy, but it also builds trust, empathy, and a sense of satisfaction with positive user experience.

4.2. Recognisability

Symbols are understood by intuition, and what is intuition – knowledge stored in the subconscious. They depict objects and phenomena by adding new meanings inherent in other objects and phenomena. They have an objective, spiritual, expressive, associative content. They describe real or fictional images to create a vision of an idea, thought, knowledge. Therefore, often the appearance cannot be identified with the meaning of the desired suggestion. By applying a sign system, the symbol takes a material form that carries meaning, summarizes knowledge in order to be used among large communities. This external form is related to and consistent with human perceptions and has withstood the dynamics of time and the ability of different cultures to perceive it. Based on their perceptions, the recipients analyse meaningful structures, classifying them according to their personal experience, attitudes and stereotypes. Thus, with the help of memory, imagination and logical connections, one builds mental concepts of complex relationships in the surrounding world.

4.3. Relevance

The design of graphic forms for the needs of visual communication includes a preliminary process of research and approbation. The need and relevance of using one image and symbol or another in the graphic concept should be clarified in order to ensure understanding and approval by the audience. Thus, the formation of unrealistic preliminary expectations can be prevented by staying within the moral, cultural and aesthetic boundaries. Symbols have a specific definition and can provoke people to perceive wide ranging information represented by images. The appropriate selection of images has the power to activate emotional resonance among the audience and achieve the main goal of the specific campaign.

4.4. Creativity

Having clarified the above characteristics of symbols in graphic communication, a certain universality and repetitiveness of concepts can be established. Along with these important requirements for accessibility and functionality, visual graphics need creativity. Original creative thinking is a skill that leads to generation of unconventional solutions in situations that require flexibility and resourcefulness (Tonkova, 2020, p. 298). It relies on the interpretation of reality, provoking to non-standard solutions, which is a reflection of the implied new meanings. Such a design should have personalized features and uniqueness. Thus, the symbolism refracted through creative thinking adds new value and meaning to objects or actions, without changing the primary qualities (Eliade, 1991, p. 172). Consequently, the conceptual idea should provide insight from different perspectives, original style, innovation, highlight a product or service among others, attract interest and entertain.

4.5. Cultural affiliation

Images and symbols are the fruit of people's understanding of the world and their cultural heritage. Despite their common nature, their meaning is treated in a number of different ways depending on the national and social affiliation. In his studies, Adrian Frutiger argues that they are subject to constant adaptation to the dynamic environment of their use and have a clarifying and standardizing function where speech is insufficient or universality is sought (Frutiger, 1998, p. 359). Therefore, when applying them in graphic design, one should be aware of the specific cultural consciousness of the target audience in order to ensure they are properly deciphered. Mircea Eliade defines „man as a historical, concrete, authentic being who is in a certain „situation“. His real existence takes place in his time, which is not his father's time. Nor it is the time of his contemporaries from any other continent or even from another country“ (Eliade, 1991, p. 29). Hence, the application of the symbol in design should also be synchronized with the visual culture of the present moment, because the processes of

development in communication continue to both use old and generate new symbolic meanings. Conforming the vision of the content carriers to the cultural background of the audience leads to a good cultural connotation of the graphic environment.

5. APPLICATION OF THE SYMBOL IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Graphic design, as a means of visual communication, widely applies a non-verbal presentation of content, through images and symbols, to reach a wide audience. This article will explore the application of symbols in contemporary graphics, by examining and systematizing some of the most common and recognizable examples. To provide an analysis of the 10 most widely used symbols, they will be selected by several indicators.

- Symbols that illustrate the topic by external features, literally through a realistic approach.
- Symbols that illustrate or relate the topic in a logical approach.
- Symbols that illustrate or relate the topic in a logical and associative approach.
- Symbols that illustrate or relate the topic in an associative approach. The object is missing, but it is present through the recipient's imagination.
- Symbols that illustrate or relate the topic in a narrative approach. They can transform real images by merging, replacing and adding futuristic elements.

The source of the main database will be the huge collection of posters selected from 1995 to 2022 in the 10 consecutive editions of the catalogue of the International Triennial of Stage Poster – Sofia. From its first edition until today, the main goal of the triennial has been to present the work of creative artists from all over the world who are dedicated to the poster art. The exhibitions have gained popularity among the authoritative international forums that provoke the audience's intellect for new explorations and a change in the aesthetics and expectations in those border areas where art, advertising and communication meet (Spasova, 2019, p. 30). Thanks to the hard work of the Triennial creators - Bozhidar Ikonomov, Bozhidar Yonov and Albena Spasova - over 100 exhibitions have been organized in the country and abroad. They reveal the diversity in the artists' conceptual thinking, dynamic scope, visual codes for dialogue with the audience, interesting styles, new technologies and current trends. The participants come from all continents, including the most influential masters in the field of graphic design. The total number of represented authors is 1242, with 3202 works (Tab. 1). The works cover a wide range of political, cultural, intellectual, moral, spiritual, religious and other issues. The sustainability during the years of the art forum editions is an indisputable proof of its comprehensiveness, impartiality and ability to track the development of graphic culture on a global scale. These factors are the reason to claim that the conclusions drawn from the selection are global and reliable.

Edition of the International Triennial of the Stage Poster – Sofia	Number of participants	Number of works
1995	191	552
1998	152	405
2001	156	388
2004	156	378
2007	145	363
2010	139	287
2013	147	303
2016	54	168
2019	51	189
2022	51	169
Total	1242	3202

Tab. 1
Number of participants and works represented in the exhibitions of the International Triennial of Stage Poster – Sofia from 1995 to 2022.

It is no coincidence that the poster is selected as a source for conclusive study, because exactly this art is closest to society, exhibited on streets, totems and billboards. It is one of the most successful graphic design products. Since its inception, it has been a universal form of communication. It represents content mainly through images and therefore it is established as a preferred information channel (Georgieva, 2023, p. 149). The visual language it uses is saturated with symbolism and it reveals essential characteristics of things in a synthesized form condensed by provocations for reflection.

After thorough examination of the works contained in the 10 consecutive catalogues, a selection was made of the 10 most frequently applied visual symbols in graphic design. The selection was made according to the following criteria:

- The symbol is part of the visualization of the leading idea and the author's perception of the world;
- The image does not reproduce reality, but imparts a new symbolic meaning;
- Communicability, recognizability, relevance of the symbols used;
- Creativity of the art solutions.

The selection made according to the established criteria showed interesting results. The most frequently used symbol is the hands – in 86 posters, second is the bird – 74 posters, third is the heart – 65 results, followed by crown – 45, eye – 43, mouth – 38, mask – 32, wings – 29, chair – 21, skeleton – 19 and others. Interesting for the study of visual communication is the analysis of these results, which will show important aspects of the application of the symbol and the variety of meanings it can interpret.



Fig. 1

The 10 most frequently applied visual symbols in graphic design
(Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, 1995-2022).



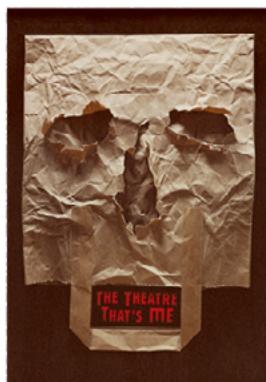
1.7



1.8



1.9



1.10

Fig. 1 (continuation)
The 10 most frequently applied visual symbols in graphic design (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, 1995-2022).

Painting the human hand is a favourite subject for artists. It is one of the most expressive parts of human anatomy. The shapes and lines eloquently suggest the profession, age, temperament and emotionality of the character. It is no coincidence that many people trust palm reading as one of the ways to predict the future and reveal the past. A touch with the whole palm is perceived as a blessing, ordination, consecration, transmission of energy. These characteristics turn the hand into a symbol in graphic design, as an expression of creativity, sensuality, empathy, care, protection, power, guidance, etc. Depending on the position of the palm and the fingers, more than 2,000 communicative gestures can be recognized. The interpretation of the use of one hand or the other is also interesting. The right hand represents honour, charity, protection, integrity, bliss (except in Chinese and Japanese culture). The meaning of the left hand is the opposite – hypocrisy, punishment and curse (Berov, 2000, p. 199).

One of the emblematic poster designers of our time, Michal Batory (France), created a poster for the Renaissance tragedy “Titus Andronicus” using the the bleeding hand of revenge as a central image (Fig. 1, 1.1). The play is considered one of Shakespeare’s most brutal works and therefore, the author visualizes a dramatic composition combining the symbol of the hand as an illustration of aggression and a candle as an expression of death and religious fanaticism. The creative concept convincingly immerses the viewer in the extremely antagonistic relationships in the struggle for power. The plot is illustrated by means of a narrative approach. Real objects are merged into one to create a new interpretation of the artwork (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2004, p. 132).

The bird is an image that symbolises liberation from physical boundaries, because it floats freely in the sacred space between Heaven and Earth. Often the immortality of the human soul is depicted as a bird flying out of the body in the last moments of life. Therefore, it is an expression of the spirituality of human nature, wisdom, strength, love and beauty. This image is directly associated with freedom and renewal, because of the annual migration of flocks. It has become a universal symbol of power, royal power, victory and the gods.

The double-headed eagle is used in a number of flags and coats of arms. Because of these positive characteristics, in some cultures it is believed that killing a bird brings misfortune. Some birds have negative properties as well, such as raven, crow, magpie, jay and parrot. They may depict darkness, destruction, war, witchcraft, imitation, etc (Bruce-Mitford, 2019, p. 58-63).

In visual communication, these meanings are not applied in their pure form, but often in combination with other images, they recreate a story, an art image that should be interpreted by the viewer. Particularly interesting is the interpretation of Nenko Atanasov (Bulgaria) in his poster for the comedy play „The Colonel Bird“ (Fig. 1, 1.2). Here the bird is a symbol of salvation from starvation of patients forgotten in a psychiatric clinic during the war in Yugoslavia. With his inherent sense of humour, the author transformed the image to create a visual metaphor of the paradoxical plot of the play. The composition is distinguished by a deliberate conventionality that ignores the figure of the protagonist in order to make an allusion to it through an associative approach, replacing it with the remnants of a slice of pizza. The viewers are provoked by the unusual combination of symbols and their curiosity about the development of the events is undoubtedly aroused (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2007, p. 15).

In Western cultures, the heart is believed to be the source of emotions and love, while all traditional civilizations define it as the repository of reason and intuition. In ancient Egypt, it was believed to be the source of life, will and reason. Islamic tradition perceives the heart as the centre of contemplation and spiritual life. (Shevalie, 2000, p. 439-443)

In his poster, Leszek Zebrowski (Poland) recreates the dramatic love story in the play „Romeo and Juliet“ (Fig. 1, 1.3) with extreme laconicity. The symbol of pure love is represented with the image of a sharp-teethed trap in which the two lovers fall. Large visual pauses in the background reinforce the feeling of stagnant tension and hopelessness. The form is profoundly transformed and stylized, acquiring an unrealistic and whimsical appearance to recreate a deeper meaning of a new object of content. The associative approach is applied, which allows the recipient's imagination to complete the conceptual idea (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2010, p. 76).

A solar symbol of honour, power, glory, victory and might is the crown. It is believed that the one who wears it is blessed to rule with spiritual enlightenment given by the gods. The round shape is an expression of perfection and unity with the celestial nature. It is depicted with sharp points – a symbol of the sun's rays – to identify it with the celestial halo (Shevalie, 2000, p. 517-520). Centuries of struggle for power and the greed of rulers have turned this image into an ambivalent one. Authority and submission to the crown are transformed into oppression, fierce ambition and an insatiable thirst for supremacy.

In his poster „Ridiculous“, Renato Aranda (Mexico) recreates the absurdity of tyrannical power with the virtuosity of a true artist. Combining the symbolism of the crown with a fool's hat, it reveals the grotesque of the ruler blinded by hegemony (Fig. 1, 1.4). The figure of the protagonist is missing, but his presence is tangible thanks to the convincing composition that creates an allusion to the presence of a human face. Large empty spaces are not accidental, they aim to create a feeling of something unuttered, an opportunity for the viewer to interpret and complete the artistic image on their own. In this respect, it can be noted that the author creates his work not only through shapes and lines, but also through their absence in the composition (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2004, p. 73). Man's desire to get to know the surrounding world is best associated with the eyes. They are also a mirror of the spiritual world, they clearly show happiness, love, aggression and sadness, which is why they are a major portrait feature in art. In religious teachings, they are treated as an expression of divine knowledge, power and protection. In many cultures, they are depicted together with the sun as the embodiment of the all-seeing eye of God (Biderman, 2003, p. 292). In the composition of his poster for the opera „Rigoletto“ by Giuseppe Verdi, Danny Warner (USA) has placed the eyes in the visual and conceptual centre (Fig. 1, 1.5). They are part of the expressionless face of the court jester and recreate the idea of cynicism, lust and the vengeful human nature. The face becomes a symbol

that illustrates the image of the protagonist by external signs, through a realistic approach. The emphasis in the artistic interpretation of the tragic events that take place in the three acts of the opera is the dagger – a symbol of the ridiculous murder of a young woman. The act of crime is not depicted, only the intention to act can be read, which happens through association and the viewer's imagination. The two guiding symbols communicate convincingly in order to visualize the plot of the stage play in a laconic, intelligent and aesthetically pleasing form (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2013, p. 96).

As part of the most expressive features of the human face, the mouth is a main image expressing emotions and thoughts. It is a symbol of creative power and vital breath. It can be angelic, pronounce divine and warm words, but it can also curse and threaten. With its unique expressive lines, Bata Knezevic (Serbia) embeds a furiously screaming mouth held by a powerful hand (Fig. 1, 1.6). The protagonist is not depicted, but his presence is indirectly felt. The dynamic composition draws attention to the inability to hear the words shouted in timelessness (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2004, p. 116).

A mandatory attribute in a number of religious rituals is the mask. It is used for transformation, identification with the Divine or the Evil, as well as for acquisition of spiritual energy. It is also the embodiment of the art of Ancient Greek theatre, expressing both the comic and the tragic side of life. In his work for the VI International Gombrowicz Festival (Fig. 1, 1.7), the great master of painted poster Wieslaw Valkuski (Poland) uses the mask as a symbol of the weight that humanity carries. The figural composition skilfully connects the theme of the event through a logical and associative approach. The multiple masks embody the roles that people play in life. It's easy and fun at first, until they fall victim to their own ambitions. Theatre, being an art that knows human strength and weakness, is burdened with the responsibility of telling the truth, even if it is not convenient for society (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2001, p. 87).

The embodiment of inspiration and freedom of spirit are the wings. They are associated with the positive symbol of the bird by synthesizing its best. They represent the path to the divine, the desire to overcome human weaknesses. The wings added to the image change the meaning to spirituality and divinity (Shevalie, 2000, p. 544). Jean Benoit Levy (Switzerland), in his poster for Lausanne Cathedral Concert Society (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 1998, p. 108), uses exactly this suggestion of serenity to present the organ concert in the cathedral of Lausanne (Fig. 1, 1.8). The abstract approach of the author, fully in line with the nature of the event, recreates a highly aesthetic arbitrary composition of unreal images that stimulate a flight of imagination and non-verbal enjoyment of the art of music.

The throne is a symbol of the ruler's power. It is usually placed in the middle of the palace to show that this is the centre of the universe and that all subjects should bow their heads to it. This idea of absolute power is brilliantly visualized by Lex Drewinski (Germany) in his poster for Georg Büchner's play "Danton" (Fig. 1, 1.9). The fusion of the symbols of power and a merciless guillotine emphatically recreates the image of the French Revolution era. With his inherent syntheticity of expression, the author presents his critical view of the fateful events in the theatrical play. By applying the narrative approach of hyperbolization in full force he adds emotional strength and emphasizes his original interpretation (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 1998, p. 37).

The human skull is a symbol of death and mortality of the human body. It is widely used in art as an allegory of existential and philosophical ideas. The poster "The Theatre That's Me" (Spasova, Ikonomov & Yonov, edition 2010, p. 73) by Tomasz Boguslawski (Poland) depicts this concept of the ephemeral human life, in which man wanders between the material and the spiritual in pursuit of bliss (Fig. 1, 1.10). The combination and interaction between the selected symbols describes and adds new content to the art image in the work. The viewers are provoked to unlock their imagination in order to associate the images with their idea of theatre art.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The variety of approaches to applying the symbol in visual communication is boundless. Every designer uses intuition and creativity to most accurately recreate the concept. Particularly interesting is the treatment of images in poster art. The presentation of the plot of a theatre piece related to an abundance of characters, events and philosophical ideas can be achieved in one format solely through artistic synthesis. This is also the reason why the present study is focused on this genre of graphic design in order to bring out the 10 most frequently applied symbols in visual communication.

It can be noted that the selected symbols do not have a strong mythological, religious and cultural meaning. They are related to the physical body and the surrounding world, therefore it can be indicated that they are easily recognizable. More interesting is the way in which the symbol is turned into a story that is told to the audience. Each element, detail, colour, and structure adds a new part of the plot. A key moment in revealing the visual code that the author creates in the work is to unleash of the viewer's thought to form unintentional associative connections between the individual components in the composition. The complex interweaving of meanings provokes a perceptual game of connecting ideas that have appeared in fantasy and transforming them from logic. Despite the numerous interpretations, this process is largely subconscious and natural. The same stage performance can be interpreted by the graphic designer in a different way and to acquire the meaning of a stand-alone work of art in the form of a poster.

After the analysis of the 10 most frequently used symbols in visual communication, the following conclusions can be summarized:

- The symbols in visual communication are first subordinated to the content and are subsequently interpreted in the creation of an art image.
- Each symbol adds new content to the communication process.
- Symbols are read by intuition, imagination and intellect.
- Depending on the combination and interaction of symbols with different meaning, the visualized content drifts away from the phraseological meaning of each separate one.
- The symbols both in speech and in visual communication, when placed in a specific context, are interpreted with ambivalent meaning.
- The application of symbols is characterized by a high degree of idealization, hyperbolization, syntheticity and conventionality.
- Design does not represent reality, but is a synthesis of the most essential.
- The content is presented by a visual code, which is decoded by the viewer's intellect, imagination and emotional world.
- The artistic summary of the images in visual communication is an important factor in the way the creative concept is read by the audience.

It should be noted that despite the many research aspects of this topic, the use of symbols for expression and communication is a natural need and ability of the intellect. The complexity of decoding the meanings depends on the selected audience and the content volume. The approach is adaptable to different occasions and audiences. Even if they are not fully understood by the mind, it is intuition that completes the overall perception of the general meaning. The designer's craftsmanship consists of finding the appropriate symbolism and context of representation in order to achieve an equal dialogue between image and viewer. The knowledge of the variety of interactions, expressiveness and formulation of the symbol allows its free and purposeful application in visual communication. It becomes a kind of translation of textual information, refracted through the prism of creative thinking. This article is useful for revealing the meanings and impact of images in graphic design production to help purify it from illustrative and decorative features. With joint efforts, authors can realize and establish a style of aesthetics, functionality and ergonomics, comfort and accessibility for the audience.

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Krasimira Drumeva is an artist, graphic designer and university professor. She works in the field of print and web advertising, logo, poster, photography and painting. She teaches Graphic Design and Visual Communication at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. In 2015 she defended her doctorate work in Art Theory and Fine Arts. At present she is an Associate Professor and the Head of the University Department of Graphic Design and Visual Communications. She works with local students as well as Erasmus students in Poland, France, Lithuania and Portugal. Besides lecturing, she initiates creative collaborations with students and manages art workshops for children. She is the author of numerous academic articles, educational literature, and books for students and young designers. She is a member of the board of directors of the Veliko Tarnovo Representation of the Union of Bulgarian Artists.

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