Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

A Semiotic Analysis of Visual Design Elements in Animated Film Posters

Animasyon Film Afişlerinde Görsel Tasarım Öğelerinin Göstergebilimsel Çözümlemesi

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Abstract

Animated film posters are not merely visual surfaces serving promotional purposes; they constitute multi-layered fields of meaning in which cultural, aesthetic, and ideological codes are reproduced. This study examines the function of visual design elements in the production of meaning within animated film posters, within the framework of Roland Barthes' two-level semiotic model. In this context, promotional posters of the Disney–Pixar films Inside Out (2015), Coco (2017), and Soul (2020) are investigated through qualitative semiotic analysis using purposive sampling.

The analytical process is conducted on the basis of Barthes' levels of denotation, connotation, and myth; in each poster, layers of meaning are examined through design elements such as typography, color, form, and composition. The findings demonstrate that animated posters are not merely aesthetic arrangements but also establish a "pre-narrative" between the viewer and the film through cultural representations and emotional guidance. The emotional connotations of color, the integration of typography with character identity, and the narrative orientation of composition generate a distinctive visual myth in each film.

This study argues that graphic design in animated cinema operates beyond an aesthetic instrument and reveals how meaning is constructed through cultural codes. In this way, the poster becomes a communicative plane in which movement is represented in static form and narrative is visually encoded.

Keywords: Semiotics, film poster, visual design, meaning-making, graphic design.

JEL Codes: Z10, Z11, Z19.

Özet

Animasyon film afişleri, yalnızca film tanıtımına hizmet eden görsel yüzeyler değil; kültürel, estetik ve ideolojik kodların yeniden üretildiği çok katmanlı anlam alanları olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu çalışma, animasyon film afişlerinde yer alan görsel tasarım öğelerinin anlam üretimindeki işlevini, Roland Barthes'ın iki düzeyli göstergebilimsel modeli çerçevesinde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda Disney-Pixar yapımı Inside Out / Ters Yüz (2015), Coco (2017) ve Soul (2020) filmlerine ait tanıtım afişleri, nitel göstergebilimsel çözümleme yöntemiyle ve amaçlı örnekleme tekniği kullanılarak incelenmiştir.

Analiz süreci, Barthes'ın denotatif, konotatif ve mit düzeyleri temelinde yürütülmüş; her afişte tipografi, renk, biçim ve kompozisyon gibi tasarım öğeleri üzerinden anlam katmanları çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular, animasyon afişlerinin yalnızca estetik düzenlemeler değil, aynı zamanda kültürel temsiller ve duygusal yönlendirmeler aracılığıyla izleyiciyle film arasında bir "ön-anlatı" kurduğunu göstermektedir. Renklerin duygusal çağrışımları, tipografinin karakter kimliğiyle bütünleşmesi ve kompozisyonun anlatısal yönelimi, her filmde özgün bir görsel mit üretmiştir.

Bu çalışma, grafik tasarımın animasyon sinemasındaki işlevini estetik bir araçtan öteye taşıyarak, anlamın kültürel kodlar aracılığıyla nasıl üretildiğini tartışmaktadır. Böylelikle afiş, hareketin durağan biçimde temsil edildiği, anlatının görsel olarak kodlandığı bir iletişim düzlemi hâline gelmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göstergebilim, film afişi, görsel tasarım, anlam üretimi, grafik tasarım.

JEL Kodları: Z10, Z11, Z19.

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1. Introduction

Visual communication constitutes one of the principal domains of meaning production in contemporary culture and assumes a decisive role in the cinema industry through its aesthetic and ideological layers. Visual texts produced within cinematic contexts do not merely reflect aesthetic preferences; they reproduce social values, cultural representations, and ideological orientations. In this respect, film posters are not regarded solely as promotional materials but as visual texts that shape audience perception, establish the first point of contact with the film, and predefine the narrative frame (Berger, 1972; Dyer, 1982). In poster design, meaning is constructed through the integration of formal elements such as color, typography, form, and composition; this structure brings together the aesthetic principles of graphic design and the narrative strategies of cinema on a single plane. Consequently, the poster acquires the quality of a distinctive communicative field in which cinematic narration is reconstituted on a static surface.

Animated cinema constitutes a particularly suitable domain for semiotic analysis due to the high degree of visual density it embodies, especially in terms of color, form, and character design. Its detachment from realistic representation enables abstract concepts, emotions, and thematic concerns to be translated directly into visual language. This characteristic renders visual design elements in animated posters not merely aesthetic but also inherently semantic in function. Within this framework, animated film posters are evaluated as dense fields of meaning in which movement, emotion, and narrative are represented on a static surface (Bogdanou, 2022).

Barthes (1977), conceptualizes meaning production in visual signs as operating on two levels: denotation and connotation. While denotation encompasses the objects, figures, and forms visible at the surface level, connotation activates their cultural, emotional, and ideological associations. This dual structure enables the analysis of meanings constructed beyond descriptive elements, within cultural and ideological strata. Barthes' notion of myth further reveals that this process generates naturalized meanings at the social level, rendering cultural values visible as if they were self-evident and inevitable.

Within the framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), visual design is approached as a grammatical system. Composition, gaze direction, scale, visual hierarchy, and framing are defined as elements that perform linguistic functions in the production of meaning. This approach demonstrates that visual design operates not only as a formal arrangement but also as a semantic system, allowing the poster to be interpreted as a visual discursive space in which meaning is structured.

In this context, animated film posters generate a "pre-narrative" that establishes the initial contact between the viewer and the film and anticipates its emotional atmosphere and thematic orientation (Dondis, 1973). The pre-narrative constructed on the poster directs the viewer's prospective relationship with the film; the fundamental codes of narration are structured on the visual plane prior to viewing. Thus, the poster acquires the quality not merely of a promotional tool but of a communicative field in which narrative is pre-encoded in visual form.

A review of the literature indicates that studies on film posters have predominantly been conducted within the frameworks of marketing strategies, cinematic language, or general visual culture. Animated film posters, however, have often been approached as visual products intended primarily for child audiences, and the specific role of graphic design elements in their production of meaning has not been systematically examined within a semiotic framework. In particular, analyses conducted through the instruments of the design discipline itself, placing design elements at the center of interpretation, remain limited.

Within the scope of this research, the posters of the Disney–Pixar films 'Inside Out (2015)', 'Coco (2017)' and 'Soul (2020)' have been examined semiotically. The primary aim of the study is to analyze the role of visual design elements in the production of meaning in animated film posters and to demonstrate that these posters function not merely as promotional materials but also as cultural and symbolic narrative instruments. To this end, Barthes' model based on the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth has been refunctionalized within the context of graphic design, and the pre-narrative potential of animated posters has been examined from a design-oriented perspective. In this respect, the study seeks to theoretically reposition animated film posters within the discipline of graphic design.

2. Method

This study is designed within a qualitative research framework and aims to examine animated film posters through semiotic analysis. Qualitative methodology enables an in-depth interpretation of visual signs within their aesthetic, cultural, and semantic contexts (Lester,

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2013). Within this framework, posters are approached as "visual texts," and the processes through which meaning is produced are analyzed within a theoretical structure.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in Roland Barthes' two-level model of semiotics (1977). According to Barthes, every sign emerges from the unity of a "signifier" (image, form, word) and a "signified" (concept, idea); this unity operates on both denotative and connotative levels. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of the sign, whereas connotation denotes its cultural, emotional, and ideological associations. In line with this approach, visual elements are treated not merely as descriptive forms but as carriers of cultural meaning. Barthes' level of "myth" is employed to reveal how these meanings are transformed into naturalized ideological narratives within the social sphere.

The sample consists of the official promotional posters of the Disney–Pixar films Inside Out (2015), Coco (2017), and Soul (2020). The sample was determined through purposive sampling. These films were selected because they display distinct narrative orientations in terms of color use, typography, lighting, and cultural representation, rendering them suitable for comparative analysis. Moreover, their production within the period 2015–2020 allows the sample to reflect contemporary animation aesthetics.

The analytical process was structured in accordance with Barthes' levels of denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1977). In each poster, visual design elements were examined through a systematic reading scheme. In order to render the analytical procedure explicit, the following methodological matrix was employed:

Table 1. Methodological Matrix for Semiotic Analysis of Animated Film Posters

Level of Analysis	Design Elements Examined	Guiding Question	Analytical Objective
Denotative	Color, typography, figure, composition	"What is visible?"	Description of visual elements
Connotative	Color associations, formal language, visual metaphor	"What does this evoke?	Interpretation of cultural and emotional meanings
Mythic	Narrative structure, modes of representation, ideological orientation	"Which cultural narrative is being reproduced?"	Elucidation of social and ideological meaning

This matrix operationalizes Barthes' semiotic model by translating its theoretical levels into concrete analytical steps. Each poster was examined sequentially across the three levels. At the denotative level, visible design elements were systematically identified and described. At the connotative level, these elements were interpreted in terms of their cultural and emotional associations. At the mythic level, the broader ideological and narrative structures reproduced by the poster were examined. The guiding questions and analytical objectives specified in the matrix structured each stage of interpretation and ensured methodological consistency across the sample.

In accordance with this matrix (Table 1), the analysis was conducted in three stages:

(1) At the denotative level, visual elements present in the posters were described.

(2) At the connotative level, the cultural and emotional associations of these elements were interpreted.

(3) At the level of myth, the social and ideological narratives reproduced by the posters were examined.

This methodological approach integrates the aesthetic dimension of visual design with the cultural production of meaning, aiming to render visible the multi-layered communicative structure of animated film posters (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Thus, the analytical process is constructed within a theoretically grounded, systematic, and reproducible framework.

3. Visual Design and Meaning in Film Poster Construction

Graphic design operates fundamentally as a communicative practice in which visual form functions as a vehicle for meaning. Design elements such as color, typography, spatial organization, and compositional hierarchy do not merely serve aesthetic purposes; they structure perception and guide interpretation. Visual components constitute a "visual language" whose syntax is formed through contrast, balance, rhythm, and emphasis, and every design decision participates in meaning-making by directing attention and shaping cognitive response (Dondis, 1973).

From a communication-oriented perspective, graphic design may be understood as the intentional production of visual messages that influence knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. This perspective situates design not as decoration but as a strategic process in which form is inseparable from content (Özkan, 2024). Accordingly, visual artifacts function as semiotic systems in which meaning is constructed through the orchestration of formal elements. In the context of film posters, this orchestration mediates between cinematic narrative and audience perception, translating narrative potential into

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a static visual configuration (Frascara, 2004).

Visual design can be conceptualized as a grammatical system comparable to linguistic structures. Composition, framing, gaze direction, and visual hierarchy perform functions analogous to syntax in language, and meaning emerges not solely from represented objects but from their relational positioning within the visual field. The poster thus becomes a discursive space in which narrative, affect, and ideology are visually organized. Multimodal texts generate meaning through the interaction of image, typography, color, and spatial arrangement, each contributing to interpretive coherence (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Within film culture, posters function as threshold objects that precede and frame cinematic experience. Promotional materials shape expectations and orient interpretation before engagement with the primary text, establishing an anticipatory narrative space in which thematic tone, genre, and emotional atmosphere are prefigured. In this sense, posters should be understood not merely as marketing devices but as visual narratives that condense and rearticulate cinematic meaning through graphic form (Johnston, 2019).

The poster thus operates as a site where design becomes narrative. Through chromatic dramaturgy, typographic identity, and compositional direction, abstract themes are rendered perceptible. Color constructs emotional orientation; typography embodies tone and character; composition establishes visual trajectories that simulate narrative movement within static space. Historically, poster design has evolved as a synthesis of art, communication, and persuasion, in which visual form functions simultaneously as aesthetic structure and semantic agent (Meggs & Purvis, 2016).

In animated film posters, this design-driven meaning-making acquires heightened intensity. Animation's capacity for abstraction enables emotions, psychological states, and metaphysical concepts to be externalized visually. Consequently, design elements do not merely illustrate narrative content but actively construct interpretive frameworks. The poster becomes an interface between viewer and film—a pre-narrative device that encodes thematic orientation through visual language.

Within this theoretical context, Barthes' semiotic model gains particular relevance. Denotative structures correspond to visible design components; connotative layers emerge through culturally encoded associations of color, form, and typographic style; and mythic structures materialize where these associations crystallize into naturalized ideological narratives. Graphic design thus functions as the operative mechanism through which semiotic meaning is spatially and visually organized.

By situating film posters within the disciplinary logic of graphic design, the poster can be understood not as a peripheral promotional artifact but as a complex visual text in which design operates as a semiotic engine. Meaning is not added to form; it is produced through form. In this sense, poster design constitutes a mode of visual thinking that translates narrative, emotion, and ideology into structured visual experience.

4. Semiotic Analysis and Discussion

Visual signs constitute multidimensional structures in which meaning extends beyond surface description and unfolds across cultural, ideological, and emotional layers. Roland Barthes' (1977) semiotic model provides a theoretical framework that enables the decoding of this layered structure. At the core of the model lies the assumption that every visual element functions not only as a signifier (form, image, color, typography) but also as a signified (meaning, emotion, cultural reference). According to Barthes, the interaction of these two levels generates a third level—myth—through which cultural ideologies and social values are rendered natural and self-evident. In this sense, visual signs do not merely describe reality but actively reconstruct it within cultural discourse.

Animated film posters constitute some of the most intensive visual texts in terms of meaning production. While a poster contains iconographic elements that represent the film's narrative world, it simultaneously establishes a cognitive and emotional relationship with the viewer through the formal language of graphic design. Color palettes, typographic choices, figure–ground relations, and compositional orientations enable the viewer to develop an intuitive understanding of the film's atmosphere, theme, and narrative direction prior to viewing. According to Dondis (1973), color, form, and contrast function as primary codes that direct visual perception; when integrated with typography and composition, these codes generate narrative coherence and determine how a visual text is read.

In this respect, animated film posters function not merely as promotional surfaces but as semantic interfaces through which cultural myths are graphically reproduced. When considered in light of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual language and Mirzoeff's (1999) perspective on visual culture, the poster emerges

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as a visual discursive field in which meaning is structured through the organization of design elements. The poster thus produces a "pre-narrative" that encodes the film's thematic orientation on a static surface and directs the viewer's perceptual and emotional engagement (Gray, 2010).

In this section, the posters of the Disney–Pixar films Inside Out (2015), Coco (2017), and Soul (2020) are examined in detail in accordance with Barthes' three semiotic levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. In each case, visual design elements such as color, typography, form, and composition are first addressed at the descriptive level; subsequently, their cultural and emotional associations are interpreted; and finally, the social and ideological narratives reproduced by the posters are discussed. These analyses demonstrate that animated film posters are not merely aesthetic arrangements but visual texts that structure meaning, render cultural codes visible, and establish a strong semantic bond between the viewer and the film.

The following subsections present a detailed examination of each poster within this theoretical and methodological framework.

4.1. Inside Out (2015)

Pixar's *Inside Out* (2015) presents a distinctive narrative strategy in which emotional states are personified as autonomous characters, enabling abstract psychological processes to be visualized through animation. Rather than depicting emotions as internal, invisible experiences, the film externalizes them as active agents operating within the mind. The narrative centers on the inner world of a child, Riley, whose everyday experiences are governed by five core emotions—Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust. Each emotion functions as both a psychological force and a narrative character, transforming affective states into visible, embodied entities.

This structure translates complex emotional dynamics into accessible visual metaphors and has been discussed in educational and psychological research as fostering emotional self-awareness and emotional literacy among young audiences (Ju, 2024). By rendering emotions tangible and legible, the film invites viewers—particularly children—to recognize affect not as a chaotic disturbance but as an intelligible and meaningful component of human experience. Emotions are thus framed not merely as reactions to external stimuli but as formative agents that shape perception, memory, and behavior.

The poster design (Figure 1) transfers this conceptual framework onto a static visual surface, condensing the film's thematic core into a single image. Through centralized composition, high chromatic saturation, and soft typographic form, the poster visually encodes the film's central concern with emotional balance and inner harmony. The arrangement of characters and the visual rhythm established by color and form articulate, even prior to viewing, a worldview in which emotional diversity is normalized and coherence is achieved through equilibrium. In this sense, the poster functions not merely as a promotional artifact but as a powerful pre-narrative that anticipates the film's psychological and ideological orientation.



Figure 1. Inside Out (2015). Official theatrical poster. Designer: Pixar Animation Studios Marketing & Creative Team. Digital illustration. Walt Disney Pictures / Pixar Animation Studios.

At the denotative level, the poster presents the five emotion characters grouped against a monochromatic blue background, all oriented frontally toward the viewer. This frontal arrangement establishes immediate visual contact and positions the characters as the primary carriers of meaning. The background remains visually restrained, allowing the figures to dominate the perceptual field. Each character is rendered in a highly saturated and distinct color: Joy in yellow, Sadness in blue, Anger in red, Fear in purple, and Disgust in green. These chromatic distinctions operate as visual identifiers, enabling instant differentiation among the figures. The typographic treatment is composed of rounded, cornerless letterforms whose soft geometry generates a gentle visual rhythm. This formal language signals the film's orientation toward a child and family

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audience while simultaneously echoing the emotional pliability of the characters themselves.

At the connotative level, these visual features activate a culturally embedded "emotional lexicon." Yellow conventionally signifies happiness and vitality, blue evokes melancholy, red conveys intensity and anger, purple suggests anxiety or unease, and green is associated with aversion and discomfort. These associations are rooted in a broad cultural tradition extending from Jungian symbolism to contemporary popular psychology and are readily legible to viewers (Berger, 1972). Color thus transcends its descriptive function and becomes a semantic marker of affect. The predominance of rounded forms—visible both in the contours of the characters and in the typography—evokes the interiority of the mind, suggesting a cyclical and fluid mental space rather than a rigidly segmented one. This formal softness implies that emotions are not fixed states but mutable forces capable of transformation. The typographic tone reinforces the notion of a permeable psychic landscape in which affective states coexist and interact, inviting the viewer to conceptualize the mind as an open and dynamic environment.

At the level of myth, the poster articulates an ideological narrative centered on the modern subject's pursuit of emotional equilibrium. In contemporary culture, emotional regulation is closely aligned with ideals of personal success, happiness, and self-management (Dyer, 1982). The Inside Out poster participates in this cultural discourse by constructing a psychological myth in which emotions are not deficiencies to be suppressed but intrinsic forces to be recognized and harmonized. The equal visual prominence of each color and character proposes a model of affective balance rather than hierarchical dominance. Although Joy occupies a slightly central position, the visibility of the other emotions legitimizes sadness, fear, anger, and disgust as indispensable components of human experience. Through its graphic language, the poster naturalizes the notion that emotional awareness constitutes a universal and desirable condition. Design thus becomes the vehicle through which this ideological message is rendered intuitive and self-evident. The poster ultimately produces a cultural myth that frames emotional diversity as a fundamental and affirmative aspect of contemporary subjectivity.

4.2. Coco (2017)

Pixar's Coco (2017) is rooted in the cultural framework of Mexico's Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), a tradition in which remembrance, ancestry, and continuity between the living and the dead are central values. The film narrates the story of Miguel, a young boy who embarks on a journey into the Land of the Dead in search of his familial and artistic identity. Rather than presenting death as loss or absence, Coco redefines it as a space of memory, belonging, and intergenerational connection. This narrative orientation transforms mortality into a site of cultural continuity (Agustina et al., 2024).

The poster (Figure 2) translates this conceptual foundation into visual form, condensing the film's thematic universe into a single symbolic composition. Through saturated chromatic contrasts, ornamental typography, and upward visual movement, the poster establishes a pre-narrative in which music, memory, and transcendence are foregrounded even before the film is encountered.

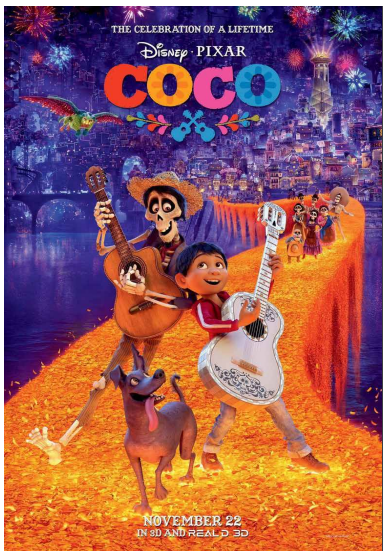


Figure 2. Coco (2017). Official theatrical poster. Designer: Pixar Animation Studios Marketing & Creative Team. Digital illustration. Walt Disney Pictures / Pixar Animation Studios.

At the denotative level, the poster depicts Miguel at the center, playing his guitar while being surrounded by luminous marigold petals that rise toward the sky. The chromatic palette is dominated by purple, orange, red, and golden tones, and the background is enriched with radiant textures that evoke movement and depth. The visual field is densely populated with light, particles, and ornamental details. The typographic form of the title is highly decorative, resembling traditional Mexican folk art and papel picado aesthetics. The logo functions as the visual nucleus of the film's identity, integrating ornamental motifs with legibility.

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These visual components activate a rich connotative field. The guitar signifies music as a medium of intergenerational connection, positioning artistic expression as a bridge between worlds. The dominance of orange evokes the marigold flowers traditionally associated with Día de los Muertos, symbolizing the path between life and death. Purple and gold tones connote spirituality, warmth, and transcendence, reframing the realm of the dead as vibrant rather than ominous. In Barthes' terms, these elements move beyond denotation and open a domain of cultural associations in which color, form, and ornament operate as carriers of symbolic meaning (Barthes, 1977). The upward movement of petals and light suggests ascension, continuity, and permeability between worlds, visually articulating the film's core metaphor of passage.

At the level of myth, the Coco poster transforms a culturally specific ritual into a universal narrative of remembrance and belonging. The visual strategy elevates Día de los Muertos from a localized tradition to a globally legible symbol of cultural identity. Death is no longer constructed as an end but as a mode of presence sustained through memory. Through warm chromatic harmony, ornamental typography, and luminous composition, the poster produces a cultural myth in which heritage becomes a living continuum rather than a static past. Graphic design thus assumes the role of a mnemonic medium, encoding collective memory into visual form. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue, visual design organizes meaning through culturally structured systems; in this context, design operates as a vehicle through which cultural memory is naturalized and made emotionally accessible. The poster ultimately articulates a myth of continuity, presenting cultural heritage as a universal human condition grounded in remembrance.

4.3. Soul (2020)

Pixar's Soul (2020) centers on existential questions concerning purpose, identity, and the meaning of life. The film follows Joe Gardner, a middle-aged jazz musician who, after a near-death experience, finds himself navigating a metaphysical realm where souls are formed and destinies are shaped. Rather than constructing death as a terminal rupture, Soul frames it as a threshold that invites reflection on lived experience. The narrative displaces the pursuit of success from external achievement toward inner fulfillment, positioning everyday existence itself as meaningful.

The poster (Figure 3) translates this philosophical orientation into a visual metaphor, condensing the film's contemplative tone into a single symbolic composition that foregrounds transcendence, introspection, and passage.



Figure 3. Soul (2020). Official theatrical poster. Designer: Pixar Animation Studios Marketing & Creative Team. Digital illustration. Walt Disney Pictures / Pixar Animation Studios.

At the denotative level, the poster depicts Joe Gardner walking across piano keys that extend into depth, illuminated by a descending beam of blue light. The chromatic palette is dominated by gradients of blue, indigo, and white, producing a luminous and atmospheric field. The background remains minimal, allowing the figure and the linear rhythm of the keys to structure the visual space. Typography is rendered in a clean, geometric, and modern typeface, devoid of ornamentation. This visual economy situates the design within a contemporary aesthetic and aligns the poster with the film's philosophical restraint.

These elements generate a rich connotative field. Blue functions culturally as a signifier of calm, introspection, and metaphysical depth. The downward beam of light evokes transcendence and spiritual illumination, suggesting a movement beyond the material world. The piano keys operate as a liminal surface—a threshold between life and death, the physical and the immaterial. Music thus becomes a metaphor for existence itself, articulating rhythm, continuity, and emotional resonance. As Lester (2013) argues, color transitions and light function at a pre-conscious level, establishing affective bonds between image and viewer; in Soul, this bond materializes as a visual expression of inward reflection.

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The poster invites the viewer not into spectacle but into contemplation.

At the level of myth, Soul reproduces the modern cultural narrative of "meaning seeking." In contemporary society, fulfillment is increasingly framed not solely through productivity or success but through inner balance and existential awareness. The poster constructs music as the emblem of this quest, symbolizing authenticity and self-realization. The dominance of blue exemplifies what Barthes (1977) defines as mythic naturalization: a culturally coded sign appears self-evident and universal. Here, color becomes the naturalized language of spirituality. The visual discourse suggests that purpose is not found in exceptional achievement but in attentive presence. Through graphic restraint and symbolic clarity, the poster produces a cultural myth in which life's value resides in lived experience itself.

4.4. Comparative Discussion of Findings

The comparative analysis of the three posters demonstrates that graphic design in animated cinema functions not merely as a formal arrangement but as a mechanism of semantic production. Each poster constructs a distinct myth within a specific cultural context; these myths operate, in Barthes' terms, as processes through which the "natural" is culturally re-coded. In Inside Out, emotional balance is naturalized as a universal psychological ideal; in Coco, cultural memory is transformed into a celebratory myth of continuity; in Soul, existential reflection is rendered as an intuitive and spiritual pursuit. Although these narratives differ thematically, all three posters employ visual design to render abstract concepts—emotion, memory, and purpose—perceptually accessible and culturally intelligible.

Across the three cases, color, typography, and composition function as primary semiotic operators. Color establishes affective orientation, typography signals cultural identity and narrative tone, and composition organizes visual hierarchy and reading direction. These elements transform the viewer's engagement with the poster from a passive act of looking into an active process of interpretation. The poster thus becomes the first narrative threshold of the film, where meaning is not only suggested but structurally encoded.

In accordance with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual language, the visual structures of these posters establish specific "reading paths" and forms of "visual hierarchy." The viewer is guided through a preconfigured interpretive route, whereby narrative expectations are formed prior to cinematic experience. The posters do not merely represent the films; they anticipate them, framing how the films will be emotionally and cognitively received.

From a semiotic perspective, these posters exemplify Barthes' layered system of meaning. Denotative elements provide visual clarity, connotative structures activate cultural associations, and mythic formations naturalize ideological narratives. In this sense, animated film posters operate as sites where cultural values are condensed and rendered intuitive. Graphic design emerges not as a decorative practice but as a discursive medium that mediates between culture, narrative, and perception.

The findings suggest that in contemporary animation, poster design participates directly in storytelling. It constructs a visual pre-narrative that shapes the viewer's interpretive horizon before the film begins. Through this function, graphic design extends cinematic narration into the public visual sphere, transforming promotional imagery into a cultural interface where meaning is produced, negotiated, and normalized.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that animated film posters function not merely as promotional artifacts but as autonomous visual texts in which cultural meaning, emotional orientation, and ideological positioning are actively produced. Through a qualitative semiotic framework grounded in Barthes' (1977) model and supported by theories of visual language and visual literacy, the research reveals how graphic design operates as a narrative and cultural apparatus within contemporary animation.

The analyses of Inside Out (2015), Coco (2017), and Soul (2020) show that each poster constructs a distinct myth: emotional balance as a universal psychological ideal, cultural memory as continuity and belonging, and existential meaning as inner awareness. Although these themes differ, all three posters translate abstract concepts—emotion, memory, and purpose—into perceptually accessible forms through color, typography, form, and composition. In this sense, the poster becomes the first narrative threshold of the film, establishing a visual pre-narrative that shapes how the cinematic experience will be emotionally and cognitively received.

By positioning the poster as a site of meaning production rather than a secondary marketing surface, this study redefines the epistemic status of graphic

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design within animation. Design is shown to be neither ornamental nor auxiliary; it is a discursive medium that mediates between culture, narrative, and perception. Barthes' semiotic model makes visible how denotative clarity, connotative association, and mythic naturalization operate simultaneously within a single visual field. Kress and van Leeuwen's theory further demonstrates that meaning is structured through compositional grammar—through reading paths, visual hierarchy, and spatial organization—rather than residing solely in imagery. Dondis' notion of visual literacy clarifies how these structures guide perception at a pre-conscious level, transforming design into a cognitive bridge between viewer and narrative world.

The principal contribution of this research lies in reconceptualizing the animated film poster as a cultural interface. The poster extends cinematic storytelling into the public visual sphere, where narrative values are condensed, normalized, and circulated. Graphic design thus participates directly in storytelling, constructing expectations, emotional orientation, and ideological framing before the film itself begins. This perspective expands the theoretical horizon of graphic design studies, demonstrating that design practices operate as cultural producers rather than neutral carriers of content.

The findings also open new avenues for future research. Comparative studies across different cultural geographies may reveal how visual myths are localized or globalized through design. The growing prevalence of digital, animated, and interactive posters invites further semiotic inquiry into motion-based promotional imagery. Moreover, given that animated films primarily address children and young audiences, the ideological and pedagogical implications of poster design warrant closer examination. These directions suggest that graphic design is a critical site for understanding how contemporary visual culture shapes perception, identity, and value systems.

In conclusion, animated film posters are complex design artifacts in which movement is translated into stillness, emotion into form, and culture into visual code. They are not merely instruments of visibility but systems of meaning in which aesthetic choice, cultural discourse, and narrative intent converge. Semiotic analysis provides a powerful methodological lens for revealing this convergence and for conceptualizing the narrative force of graphic design within contemporary visual culture.

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