

ARTISTIC CONNECTIONS IN THE EVOLUTION OF ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL STITCHING

ABSTRACT

The Romanian culture represents the creation of the Romanian people, which reflects the totality of a people creative productions, both material and spiritual life. We refer here to artistic, literary, musical, plastic, choreographic, dramatic creations, that are created and inherited through words and practices by the people. The term “traditional folk culture” defines the countryside life, that contains the old tradition of the rural life. Through tradition, we identify the context of a process of historical transformations, to which we can add elements, functions and new values.

We can certainly affirm that the entire Romanian popular culture has its profound roots in the traditional culture, extremely rich, answering the daily life needs and continuing to add new values to the Romanian cultural heritage. An attentive ethnographic investigation of the contemporary reality highlights elements achieved from the traditional culture, the way some aspects of the popular culture are reflecting in the daily life or the way that the traditional decoration has come to improve the modern life. This investigation, result of a fundamental research, illustrates the possibilities of promotion, in the actual conditions, of our popular values. Our thesis constantly highlights the importance of the emerge of new skills and customs, new occupation that contributes to the transformation of the folk culture, through the expression of some issues that correspond to the development needs of the Romanian people culture and formation of the human personality.

The Romanian traditional textiles represent a lively symbol of vitality, of the Romanian people identity – true values inherited and transmitted through tradition. The folk work doesn't reflect individual opinions, but reflects the life experience of a people, acquired over time and expressing a variety of feelings and experiences. They offer a complex image of our people customs and traditions. Through the intermediate of textiles, an artistic communication takes place – both on national and international plan – of identification of our Romanian nation. These are the arguments that nurture the wish of a more profound knowledge of traditional values. They require a historical research, starting with the textiles origins, analysing the evolution and their reinterpretation nowadays.

The textiles represent a true guidance through the knowledge and understanding of the Romanian national specific. They expressed and are still expressing the delicacy of our nation's soul. In the same time, it stimulates the inventiveness and originality – in thinking and action.

It helps to the formation of the creative talent, of a profound sense of measure, due to which we will learn to combine the useful and the beauty. The stitch marks, the richness of the decorative motifs, the refinement of the colour, along with the fineness of the execution and the nobility of the ornamental compositions – all these create the paradise of the Romanian ethnography.

The Romanian textiles are priceless treasures, that are inherited from generation to generation, as a lively expression of the national character. As far as we are concerned, the knowledge of the process used in the embroidery evolution was a challenge, as well as the specific values to this field of study.

Another important argument in the theme approach is the relevant literature, which is extremely limited concerning the textiles evolution. There are research areas that appeared a long time ago or publications that offer a lot of illustrations with numerous types of textiles and compositional motifs used in the past. These were influenced by different factors, reinterpreted and transformed due to the new technology. The changings made the last years are evident, and the path taken in the textile and embroidery domain develop to an upper stage.

Concerning the Romanian folk ornamentation, the traditional seam made us proud to the world, as being a creative and hard-working people, as a remarkable sensitivity and good aesthetic taste. We are indebted to express gratitude for many designers that created beauty, for anonymous artists that created, with an incomparable patience and mildness, a true art with collective character. Our constant preoccupation is to transmit, in the third millennium, the traditional textiles as being our most valuable possessions, because these “signs” reflect the noble spirit of Romanian women.

Our thesis wished to highlight the connection between the traditional textiles and the contemporary ones, between the elements that became part of our national identity and the present ones, inspired from folklore. The bridges between the symbols, common values of a society, creating customs, and the contemporary creations, generating unicity, are numerous. The evolution of textiles depends on the society development, on the technology, creativity stimulation and competitive spirit.

The theme of this paper is an answer to the preoccupations linked to the richness of the textiles, serving to obtain the embroidery, the lace. It's about a high interest in acquiring knowledge, develop and transmit the tradition. The present thesis is the result of a rigorous study of craftsmanship of folk art, nurtured by the passion to discover the source of originality of Romanian folklore. The main idea of the thesis was the knowledge of national values reflected through manual seams, their evolution (from the origins to nowadays), the way they were influenced by the emergence of new technologies and the way of modifying the form or

the structure. It is vital the knowledge of our country traditional culture heritage, of its role played in our lives and society. The inheritance received from our ancestors forces us to keep intact the values obtained, to contribute to their development and transmit it to our followers.

Another reason of this thesis is familiarizing the reader with the ethnographic aspects from the Romanian folk culture, of the way to create different basic textiles. We followed different aspects and traits specific to Romanian culture, but also some specific traits of other geographical zones of Europe. In perfect harmony with the scope of the thesis, we've highlighted the situations that illustrate the originality and the creative spirit of Romanian people, its love for beauty, as well as its permanent effort to embellish its work and life, through different decorations which naturally contribute to the Romanian textiles development.

The suggested objectives are treated with accuracy: the knowledge of decoration textiles used in both Romanian folk art (both in clothing and decorative art) and European, the understanding the embroidery role in contemporary art and the identification of the embroidery that influenced different areas of activity. Here are some domains in which the seams left their mark: fashion design, interior design, on household items, in photos, in painting, on objects in public spaces.

In the first part of the thesis, we have outlined the historical path of the decorations, used in the Romanian culture and other cultures, trying to detect the root of the decorating idea. We have followed some procedures of body decoration: sacrificial, tattoo, painting with henna and picture on the body. All these practices had a very clear scope: the individuals are different from one another, and the peoples are identifying one another. Over time, people tried to embellish their body by applying different decorations on the body, but once they started to use clothes, they started their decoration. Each community, people, nation, according to their own culture, introduced in its own costume some decorations, embellishing the cloths with specific values.

In order to understand the Romanian dimension of existence, it necessary to describe the folk culture, in which we find the process of elaboration, interpretation and circulation of the folk creation, which express a collective consciousness that respects some traditions that exist within a social group.

The folk art is individual. It comes out from the creator's soul, but the community acquire the creator's product. In this matter, through the literature, the folk poet expresses the feelings of the whole community, and his creation will be perceived by his fellow, who found themselves in it, and it will be considered as a spring from the people. She is the reason of the folk creation existence. The cultural creation is a metaphorical creation of the human spirit, that

wear a stylistic seal. It represents the expression of a lifestyle, and the culture corresponds to the human existence in a space placed between mystery and revelation.

The countryside was a friendly environment for developing the cultural values. The countryside people, through their talent and creation, they contributed to the artistic goods recovery and their transmission through traditions. The stylizations that appeared after, merged with the vitality of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements, created a large variety of compositional and ornamental solutions.

An important aspect of this thesis refers to the interhuman relationship development, the way that the evening sittings contributed to the social organization: they created the proper environment, where women worked together, having the possibility of transmitting creative ideas.

The social life for the Romanians, within the countryside community, represents one of the most complex activity. Family and social life were developing according to the customs of the community. There existed some limits in the manifestation, strictly respected. Countryside manifestations, customs and traditions were guarded and transmitted to the next generations. The Romanian's life was full of manifestations with social content. This contributed to the unity, through the conservation of full of charm and picturesque holidays. The atmosphere in which the holidays were held was full of originality and a special colour.

Within the cultural and social environment, the family becomes an economic core: all the members worked together for the unity, wealth and harmony of the family. This has a decisive impact on the development of human settlement. Ethnographic studies proved the importance of the family for the folk culture development and its role in the transmission of some creative creations in art.

The Romanian folk art was considered to be part of the Romanian folklore history. Romanian scholars proved the value and the creation force, on a cultural and artistic plan, of the Romanian people. Analysing the folk costume, we will follow also the cultural context that it belongs. As constructive part of the national culture, this improved its value. It is reminded in literature, admired in picture and kept in the museums of Romanian village.

Concerning the customs, we observed that the traditions concerning the family life are stronger and they have a different vitality to the customs practiced within a group of people. For example, we will remember the custom named *clacă* (group work) or *șezătoare* (evening sitting) which remain a very valuable memory, through the fact that it contributed to the development for the culture at that time. As we mentioned, the customs linked to the family life continued to develop nowadays too. There is also an amplification of these customs, according

to the new higher standards. Watching the embellishment ways of the costumes specific for the events mentioned, we observe the traditional nuance, but the aspect has new aptitudes.

During time, different ethnographic sites were born, with a well determined cultural life. Customs linked to important aspects in life has grown: birth, wedding and death.

The Romanian folk costume represents the merge between functional and artistic. It is part of the Romanian's life, being an identification mark of our nation. The name of *national costume* is given to clothing wear at countryside, full of national meanings.

Ia (the embroidered traditional blouse) is the priceless message sent by the ancestors. Its elements (wave, stream of ornaments, embroilments with certain patterns) are priceless marks inherited from our ancestors. The decorative motifs of the traditional blouse are the most elaborated ones, it represents a maximum level of embellishment, through seams that the peasant woman uses to embellish the blouse, and that can't be found in other part of the costume, like the vertical steams found on the blouse shoulders, sleeves or the back of the blouse.

Next, we studied how the ornamentation was achieved through seams, which are the initial meanings of this concept and how important is its symbolism, the meaning of decorative motifs, as specific elements of the Romanian village and the past lifestyle.

The folk decoration is represented by the totality of elements, motifs and decorative compositions, which are part of the whole art. *The symbolic decoration*, is defined by the intention that the creator transpose the decorative motifs on the embellished object. This means also a knowledge of the symbolic motif meaning, hard to decipher. That is why, for the specialists in thematic representation, the decoration has a symbolic value, as for others, the decoration has a purely aesthetic importance.

The symbols, present in the ornamentation motifs, are full of a certain meaning. They tell a tale, or they define a certain state of the spirit. We have identified the existence of some rules specific for clothing codes in the rural society from the past, defining the social status of the possessor. Over time, these clothing codes lost a bit from their value or, better saying, they were transformed. So, in the daily life we find the obligation of some clothing codes, more like a socio-professional identification. There are some rules concerning the level of elegancy for clothing, within these events. Nowadays, there is a tendency of an individual identity, a personality of clothing, with a unicity character.

In the Romanian folk art, the *artistic seam*, play an essential role in embellishment. In the decorative creation, as far as the composition is concerned, we observe a balanced and symmetric exposure of the seams. The rural costumes, that are simpler, have big white spaces,

that highlight those areas with decorative elements. The more embellished are the costumes, the white spaces are minimized due to the richness of decorative seams, that offers the costume a noble character.

To the folk costume, the most decorated pieces with artistic seams are the *ia* (embroidered traditional blouse) or the shirt, then the veil, the skirt, the band and the sheepskin. They are all decorated with a complex embroidery. If we look overall the decoration of the costume, we observe the harmony between the form and the dimension of the cloth, the seams being placed in visible places, not hidden, exposed to usage by wearing. The seams, forming decorative motifs, are uniformly placed: the neck area, the front of the product, the sleeves or wrist, at the pockets opening, at the end of the product, where the hem is. At some costumes, they embellish entirely the Romanian folk costume.

Either they are embroidered from place to place, or in a rich composition, the seams answer to some spiritual needs of the community. That is why, throughout the country regions, we find the seams embroidered on cloths, household items, embellishment textiles. The beauty of these seams is in harmony, today too, with the traditional line of the folk creation.

An important role on the folk creation domain is played by the sewing techniques, stitches through which the embroidery is realized. The stitches represent the elementary technical item which realizes its own graphic, by repeating them according to a schema. We obtain decorative elements and ornamental motifs, and their harmonious association lead to the ornamental composition. The ornamental motifs are grouped in compositions, resulting ornamental fields, some well delimited spaces, spread around differently according to each approached style or the structure of the cloth.

We have insisted on describing the Romanian traditional seams. We have started from the basic notions, concerning the raw material with which the seams are realized, and then we present the technique of essential seams, from which derived more complex decorations. Many of these decorative motifs have the mark of the symbols born from the rural life and feelings. We have realized in detail the way of sewing the folk costume seams from some geographic areas in our country, following specific aspects of Romanian countryside (events, rituals or celebrations).

Decorative motifs are built from many components. They are included in the folk costume, as a reflection of the nature, because the natural elements predominate. The nature that surrounds us was perceived in many ways, leading to a clearer understanding of its nature. Man searched to identify himself with the nature, to be part of it, adopt its elements and to print them on body and cloths. Man tried to give it meanings, that became part of his feelings.

The decorative composition contains ensembles of decorative motifs, that respect a certain order. A variety of decorative compositional solutions are obtained through repetition, alternatively and symmetrically. These are undergoing a stylization process. In an artistical composition, the harmonious unity of the ensemble is important, as well as the interdependence and the relations between motifs.

In the decorative art, we find the seam, the embroidery, the decorative motif, the ornamental compositions that are readapted or reinterpreted in different ways, like the ones that exist on the traditional costumes. Through the embroidery they create the most appreciated artistical works: on interior decorative objects or in nature, on biodegradable elements, metallic objects, photography, pictures, radiography, on street objects, mass-media, on human skin.

In order to discover the roots of the seams, of embroideries, it was necessary an intervention in the history of art of the other European people. From the studies made on lace, we discovered that there is no certain date concerning this intervention. Images about the first lace realized are presented starting with XV century in Italy, France, England.

For sure, the seam is an international element with common roots, but which spread and developed in different countries of Europe, according to the geographic areas. It didn't stay only between these limits, but it was adopted in the entire world, as an agreeable decorative element. In order to create a vision on its various aspects, it is necessary to analyse in detail the types of seams used in other European countries. Even if the seams are resembling, they have a lot of decorative motifs, that create an infinity of compositions within the products.

Cornell University Library possess the original work *Samplers and Stitches*, that describe in detail the art of manual embroidery. Here are presented as schemas the stitches, decorative motifs (abstracts, without shape, social, symbolic) and images of products realized with these seams and embroidery styles. We find seams from different countries of the world, in XVI-XIX centuries. In the work mentioned, we discover resemblances between the stitches and decorative motifs, as well as small differences concerning their form (flowers, birds, man, geometric forms) and ornamental compositions (simple and rich) that defines the specific of the area.

The circulation of ornamental motifs represents an obvious prove regarding the relations with other people, more near of more far. Even if there are resemblances between the existent seams in European countries, they are specific signs for every nation. Signs, as a symbolic essence, are common, and the Romanian seams are presented in a unique way that represents us, the circulation of traditional motifs in the European areas influences the Romanian art and offers priceless values.

We analysed interest for the new approaches to the seams in the contemporary art, through the embroidery that marked different activity domains. We consider necessary an incursion in the image world that present the clothing creations, manually created or using computers that generates a virtual reality. It is necessary to investigate the actual tendencies regarding the steams, of the technics evolution. Due to the new technologies, the embroidery can be projected through the computer, even in the clothing design domain. So, the computerized design of clothing became a new expression mode, through which we obtain forms and structures that offers new perspective to clothing.

Starting with the development of new threads and unique textures, that can be included in clothing products, and till the birth of new clothing and production techniques, each step of development in the textiles domain let a unique mark, amazing and spectacular, on the clothing, that switched from useful to art. Maybe because a huge inspiration and creativity source that the world was blessed.

The technology pierced the structure of textiles. In this matter, flexible threads were created in textiles, connected to the computer. They transform the textiles from passive elements in active elements, being a way to create flexible electronic textiles, that lighten with the help of a flexible source of energy. They generate the birth of the fashion techno clothing. These techniques bring a refresh of the textiles surfaces, just as in the past, last year, the ornamental techniques of embroidery and textiles let a valuable mark on textiles.

The speed with which the things are going nowadays determined the birth of some modern solutions linked to the clothing manufacturing process. In this sense, the new technologies let their mark on seams too. One of the aims of the seams is the functionality. This implies the unity or the details ensemble, in order to create a clothing product, but in some cases the seams were replaced by other techniques. One of these techniques is the heat-sealed operation. Another technique of cloth manufacturing that eliminated the seams is cutting the clothing form from a knitted knitwear, so that after the cutting, the result is the cloth product that can be worn immediately.

The new technologies lead to the birth of some solutions that, sprayed on the human body, become solid, taking the form of the body and covering it with a unique clothing creation. So, the manufacturing process and unification process of some details through stretches are eliminated.

Another modern solution, through which the clothing becomes alive, is the spray-on fabric technique. This offers new textures, resulted from spraying an active medical substance,

made of fiber mixtures, polymeric and solvents. Spraying it on a certain surface, the substance will transform in textile. So, it will develop a new technology based on particles and aerosols.

A higher level in clothing manufacturing, the place where the stitch is eliminated, is the 3D printing, a tridimensional projection through via the computer. The computerized projection of clothing represents a new way of expression, through which we obtain new forms and structures, that complete the body and offers new values with futuristic aspects.

Nowadays, the computerized technology reached a point where the manual work was replaced with success. She is used more and more, in different activity domains, because there are specialized software where we can build in a tridimensional form any form imagined, with a great precision. We move in a world where we are more and more familiar with the fantastic domain, a world where the man creates the environment. The natural life is replaced by the one created in imagination, and the fantastic invades the real world, in which we live.

The embroidery developed, reaching a point where it is varied in contemporary art. It was reinterpreted and readapted in a time of technology, ruled by new techniques. Some of these replaced the manual work with automatic machines, the embroidery has now new aptitudes.

An identified aspect in the seams evolution, of embroideries is that, starting from the creators' anonymity, we reached to a strong relationship between creator and his work. Even if the embroidery doesn't wear the name of the initial creator, we recognize many contemporary creators, according to the embroideries types created. They brought their contribution by letting their mark in an unmistakable way.

In the last part of the thesis, the approach was more practical. The objective was to practically experiment the traditional seams and create a new fashion collection, as a result of this thesis. So, through the decorative seams, we have contributed to the clothing creation, in the decoration domain. More exactly, we have treated the technique called lacet and the 3D printing technique. We designed the the steps in order to materialize the collection, part of the constructive projection in the clothing manufacturing and in realizing the clothing product.

The last chapter of the thesis is strictly linked by our professional experience. We have tried to finish the theoretical approach through the ideas materialization regarding the traditional steams. In the collection creation, we have been stimulated by the traditional steams richness, as well as the experienced acquired in the clothing manufacturing domain. We have combined the theory with the practice in a private fashion salon, then, as freelance and within international and national academic courses. We have get in touch with different techniques

concerning the way of realizing the seams, embroideries and clothing products, which improved our knowledge in this area.

The practical works concerning the thesis theme are personally realized “manu propria”. The fashion collection was initiated according to the techniques mentioned, starting from the collection creation, switch to model, sewing and manufacturing. All these are mentioned in the practical part, followed by manual working techniques. As a manually approach of the project, we have used the clothing decoration with a lacet type embroidery, as an agreeable, elegant, fine aspect. Some clothing products are carved with 3D decorative motifs and motifs realized with the help of a crochet.

Our personal contribution can be observed in the translation and commentaries of some texts from bibliography (national and international) or foreign library illustrations.

20.11.2017

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Oluj', written over a horizontal line.