

# THE SILK GARMENT BETWEEN ART, PHYSIOLOGIE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

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**Abstract.** *The garment, beyond its aesthetic, social and body-protection purpose, plays an important role to determinate the state of the wearer. The individual wearing the garment perceive sensations caused by his garment transmitting to the viewer visual images regarding his personality and emotional state. It is in this context that the essential role behoves to the materiality of the garment. Throughout history, the individual perceived, unconsciously, the causes, the state incited by the extraordinary textile materiality of the silk. Therefore, today the silk is used for the garment because of its esthetic and as a consequence of knowing its psycho-physiological effects.*

**Keywords:** *silk, wearer's psycho-physiology, psychological motivation of the garment*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Most of what has been written so far about the garment tackles the problems of fashion, style and composition. Problems concerning the sociology and psychology of the costume have been broached recently, but less in the light of garment materiality or in terms of psycho-physiological aspect of the wearer. In fact, the garment fabric in its intimate materiality can become a textual production, containing complex information and states of comfort and discomfort, of mental and physiological states.

The evolution of the garment regarding its materiality can be considered from different points of view: the aesthetic aspect of the garment ensemble materiality designed to impose the wearer in the eyes of the others as a presence that creates show, thus causing admiration, delight. The problem of a "fashionable" materiality in the historical evolution of the costume is also considered. Another aspect concerns the interference of the aesthetics with the functional aspect by means of garment materiality and the psycho-physiological effects of a certain clothing materiality.

The forms are "human accomplishments standing under the sign of originality, obtained through direct and programmed intervention on a given material" [1]. Thus a few questions arise: Is it the garment, by its imagined form, that calls for materiality or is the materiality bringing about the imaginary in fashion design? What is the role of materiality in the costume motivations, with reference mainly to the psycho-physiological, social-communicative and aesthetic motivations? Whereas, it is known that "on the level of concrete human experiences, these motivations may be noticed more often in "a pure state"; they usually merge, complementing each other within the same whole represented by human clothing"[1]. Fashion design is characterized by novelty and originality. However, "depending on the qualities of the textile material each piece of clothing is made of, more and more possibilities to achieve originality are involved" [1]. Just as "each form of art has its own strength in accordance with its specific means" [2] the garment gains expression force by the agreement between form and materiality. "The work of art is an attempt towards uniqueness, it asserts itself as a whole, as an absolute and at the same time it belongs to a system of complex relations. The work of art is substance and spirit, form and content" [3]. The garment is an art object. The art of the man to cover his body in a continuous

metamorphosis that we call “fashion” in a coherent expression of materiality and form, “by some kind of mutual affinity whose harmony is still looked form, is still done and undone in the most various ways [3].” The art of garment is included in the system of applied arts that “do not involve fully aesthetic autonomy...They cannot withstand by themselves, as they depend, even in their configuration, on the function they are called for to represent [1].”

The garment has the purpose of giving a certain image to the body it covers; it shows its advantages or it conceals its flaws. The dressing habits of an epoch can emphasize “the specific features of the morals and of the dominant sensibility” [4] thus the clothing history becomes a “way to enter the heart of the social history” [5].

The fiber of natural silk is a materiality with a history of millennia in the costume and textile production. Silk, as a generic term, encompasses agriculture, industry, trade, biology, literature sociology, psychology and visual arts. The role played by silk was considerable in the economic, artistic and even spiritual history of mankind. The rivalries that were caused by its production and selling influenced the games of international relations along the history. It was either an exchange value between peoples or a war prize; it was used for creating the garments worn by priests and emperors; it pointed out rank, privilege and wealth; it was an accomplice to vanity, an auxiliary of either feminine or masculine coquetry or both at the same time; it was an element of arousing the moralists’ reprimand; it was a pleasant and hygienic materiality at the same time even without realizing the latter aspect until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Silk is the solution in the equation of the tactile with visual and psycho-physiology. Being an exceptional materiality in competition with other fibers, silk wins by its refinement based on aesthetics that is accessible to all those people who want quality and comfort and are ready to pay the price.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The garment is everything that covers or wraps the body. Garmenting is the act of covering the body that is born naked, an effect of the social life thus gaining its first meaning, that of protection. The human body is frail, defenseless, always in pursuit of the means to adapt to the natural conditions and meant to create its shell; this is its response to the climate it is subjected to, by embracing the technical artifice.

As part of the personality, the garment interferes between the wearer’s personality and his physical or social environment. Revealing the wearer’s personality, the garment emphasizes a character rather than hide it. The clothes become a second skin, an artificial one, an extension to the native human corporality. Being a part of the wearer, it can be regarded under three aspects of relations: with its behavior or attitude, with the skin and bodily action. “A first reading of the clothing items that are part of a person’s wardrobe points out practical and comfort reasons, whilst the ratios between the human body and the clothing, between clothing and its accessories can also be regarded from the communicational perspective and described using effect terms” [6]. In pursuit of personal identity, the human body becomes an experimental space between bodily and social space as a reinventing necessity in which garment imposes itself as a remarkable bodily material self. By choosing his outfit, the individual tries to express himself, to define himself and to communicate individual and social messages.

The treble man-garment- environment can be tackled from the environment point of view under two aspects: the social environment, a situation in which the garment is a psycho-social sign, in which the representation sign comes first and the psychological aspect referring to both the wearer as the sender of the message and the viewer as the receiver. The former aspect refers to historical and highly hierarchical societies, the historical evidences proving

this kind of interpretation. The later aspect is that of physical environment, external to the individual in which the psycho-physiological aspect of the garment takes precedence over the wearer. We are referring to the contemporary wearer who is conscious of the mental impact that a well-chosen garment has upon him from a physiological point of view.

### 2.1. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In hierarchical societies, the act of garmenting gains the connotations of a psycho-social, class and context phenomenon. A mirror reflection of the body, the garment becomes screen and extension of the individual, an attribute of his personality, conferring upon him distinction and individuality. In the visible world of conventions, the garment may become a more accurate marker than the morphological characters when it comes to identifying an individual or a group of individuals, thus becoming a projection of the wearer's social image [7].

The case was the same in the Romanian Countries. The garment, a complement of attitude and status, was one of self-image, bringing its contribution to valuating the individual. In the overall representation, not only the general appearance mattered but also the way in which it attributed the particularity of movement to itself, which defined posture. Silk and thread textiles represented a value added to the quality of the person wearing it. Ieremia Movilă's and his brother Simion Movilă's embroidered portraits from Sucevița, show monumental, severe, strongly individualized characters. The funeral embroidery from Sucevița presenting Ieremia Movilă becomes a transmitter of the visual message of authority, dignity, strength, energy and lastly, of power. The forms and materiality of the object-function thus pervade the sphere of formal connotations, of eccentrically personalization of the wearer. The identity of garment "substitutes itself to the human identity" [8]. The form and shape became congruent centripetal forces of the power in function. The votive portrait created as "portrait of honor and family portrait" adds to this as a "representation accessory" [8].

Fashion progress takes the shape of the culture of appearances; new relations are established between the garment value and the wearer. In the decorative grammar of the two tomb veils, like in the one of Maria de Mangop's from Putna, the taste for decorative, brilliance and pomp becomes the substitute of power itself in a visual challenge of Baroque influence, in a "civilization of sight" [8] in which Aulic garment become "instruments for visual propaganda" [9].

The aspects presented above have a large temporal coverage in the Romanian society. From the votive painting in Dobrovăț depicting Stephan the Great, Bogdan III and Petru Rareș, to Neagoe Basarab represented in the group depicted in the fresco of Snagov Abbey, to the representation of Alexandru Lăpușneanu's family in Slatina Monastery, of Vasile Lupu with his family in Trei Ierarhi or of Constantin Brâncoveanu and his family in the big church of Hurez Monastery; all these representations are knot points between the image desired, the projected image and the viewer's perception. The garment fabric becomes a psycho-social fabric endowed with an exquisite power of extra-physical expression.

The phenomenon also happens in the case of easel painting that spreads later as a need to validate the personality and the status of the character depicted. Louis Dupré's "Pasha" from 1825 representing Mihai Șuțu, Alecu Ghica's portrait signed by Iosef August Schoefft and kept at the Romanian National Museum of Art or Ienăchiță Văcărescu's portrait painted by Anton Chladek and kept at Cotroceni Museum are *face-to-face* pseudo representations that abolish the representative space and establish an interpersonal relation, a duel between an "I" from a superior position and "you". In portraits of honor, the garment has the aim of changing attitudes; it puts them in order, and amplifies them on the conditions imposed on the body, shoulders and arms [2]. It is composition that gives the image to the model in order to mould the viewer's psychology. Both votive paintings and easel paintings, historical documents

endowed with demonstrative intentions, corresponded to the need to validate the individual's personality. By what it has represented for centuries, the silk garment thus becomes art, physiology and applied psychology altogether. The intentions to be expressed operate behind the technological means. A portrait of honor endowed with an obvious social message and powerful psychological burden implies a compositional arrangement that dominates the technique. According to Delacroix, "each form of art appeals to us in its own way; it implies various functions, appeals to specific attitudes." [10]

Monneyron says that the garment does not exist and does not become an image but on the body, when it is worn [11]; it is a self image and public image. If this image associates with the body posture, the relaxed visual image becomes major, it is supported by color, materiality and details. The portrait reveals a historical reality beyond an artistic convention. The portrait of the empress Maria Theresa painted by Martin van Meytens the Young and placed in the Austrian collection of the Brukenthal Palace draws the attention. The vivid colors of the empress' silk garment create a festive psychological state of mind. The same can be said about Anna Maria Hotter von Huttern's image, artistically rendered by Johann Martin Stock and included in the same museum.

The dressing codes, tailored to the history of mentalities, enter a clothing gestuality that completes the bodily one, displaying itself in a communication that becomes accessible to others using a particular language of great expressiveness. Like any other element of the social life, fashion evolves at the same time with society; particularly, fashion design most often reflects social changes and a new ideology. Garment as an object or sign, easily recognizable in the psycho-social micro universe, becomes a significant interface of the wearer's ego-identity. The garment decorates the body and completes human personality depending on the society in which the wearer wants to present himself, or which he wants to "amaze and convince" [12]. The psychology of the individual who was trying to be defined by his garment, both on personal and social level, was not very different from that of the current customers of the photographs.

## *2.2. THE EFFECTS OF NATURAL SILK ON THE WEARER'S PSYCHO-PHYSIOLOGY. A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE.*

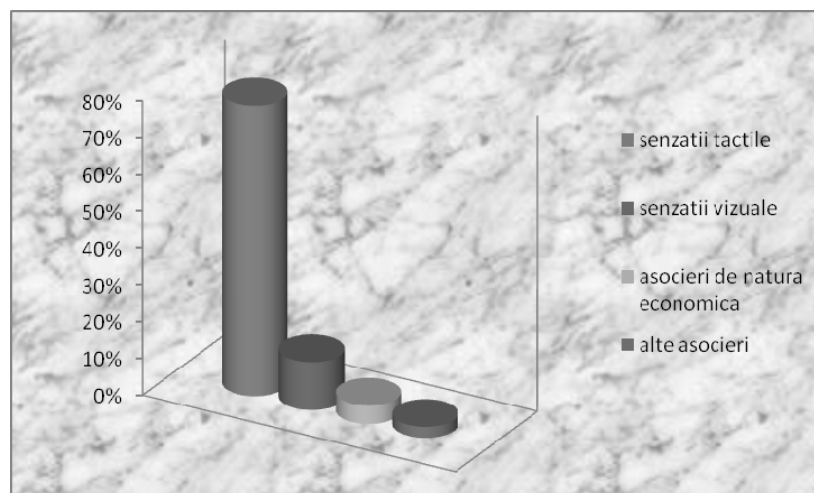
The psycho-physiological dimension of the garment refers to its utilitarian function, the first one that manifested itself as a necessity in the history of clothing. After its protection function, the social-communicative and the aesthetical one, the psycho-physiological function of mattered garmenting the least in comparison to the existing ones up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century because this aspect had not been identified due to the lack of research. The aspect of the physiological qualities of the silk is a constant concern of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with more accents laid by its end, in connexion with the effects on the environment that was regarded in the light of lasting development.

Lévy says that the "the adult man chooses his clothes depending on sensations and necessities" [13].

The garments act on the body by properties inherent to the material they are made of, by texture, color and shape. From garment materiality point of view, the current wearer, who is supposed to be a competent one, is interested in a few aspects complementary to the aesthetic, social and economical one. Clothing physiology often sends us to the psychological effect a practical garment has on the wearer, suitable from the point of view of its intimate, textural composition.

In an experiment carried out with the students in the first year at the Faculty of Visual Arts in Oradea, students who had not gained professional knowledge about textile fibers before, I challenged them to spontaneously write down three words at random suggested by

the term “silk”. The students expressed sensations created by this materiality, be it tactile: soft, smooth, delicate, pleasant, agreeable; visual: luster, veil, petal, peach, thin, transparent, summer, fluid, elegant; auditory: rustling, whisper; economical epithets: expensive, luxurious or other associations: docile, easy. In this way, these uninformed students spontaneously expressed ideas that led them to defining and identifying the characteristics of natural silk, especially of its physiological features (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1. The percentage repartition of the associations of the term "silk", according to the experiment undertaken by the 1st year students of the Faculty of Visual Arts from Oradea.**

The psychology and physiology of the garment are two notions that complete each other. Physiology sends us to the wearer’s comfort or discomfort state, states that can induce him certain feelings and mental states. Comfort itself can be defined by two aspects: physiological and psychological ones. A clothing comfort will bring about the wearer’s satisfaction, content and happiness. The wearer will be able to use more energy, will have more initiative, and will be more efficient. The sensations that can be caused by one or another of the materialities that dress the body can lead to a pleasant or unpleasant mood with reference to kinesthesia or coenaesthesia as sensibility that reflects our own physical existence. The dressing comfort is capable of generating a set-combination of organic sensations that encompass the degree of consciousness that an individual has about his own bodily existence, with which the garment is in a continuous relation. Bodily breath, the free movement of air on the surface of the skin and the stroke of the textile materiality all affect the sensorial level of the individual. Being at the border with our environment, the garments become powerful determinants of our inner consciousness.

In the same idea stated above, an analysis of the properties and characteristics of the silk as a raw material, I can create a mirror of garment capacity – in the unique light of texture composition- of ensuring the wearer’s comfort..

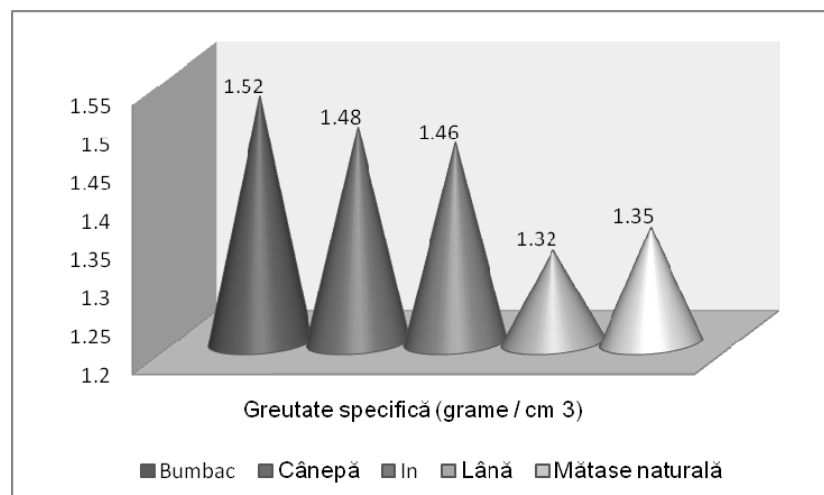
Another essential aspect of the clothing item regards the thermal comfort. Calorimetry means tackling the textile material meant for dressing the body from the point of view of radiations, absorption and caloric conductivity. Animal textile materials generally have a low conductivity [13]. Natural silk produced by worms - tamed or wild (Tussah silk), belongs to the category of natural textile fibers of animal origin. Its weak thermal conductivity gives it very good properties of thermal insulation for the wearer's body. It is cool in the summer and warm and light in the winter. Thus, silk can provide a thermal-physiological comfort undisputable for the wearer, determined by the interaction between body and climate. Its good thermal insulation was appreciated in the 16th century Japan as being a materiality that made “the long hot and humid summer to be bearable” [14], while in

China of the same century it was used more by the elders due to its comfort characteristics [15].

As a result of its capacity to absorb humidity and because it contains both positive and negative ions, silk does not generate static electricity which makes it the best choice for the wearer's comfort since a "special significance in providing the non-toxicity of the clothing is held by its electrostatic charging feature". We are talking not only about the unpleasant sensation created by the electro statically charged garment, but also about the fact that a garment that charges with static electricity, becomes a magnet for the impurities in the environment, a thing which is unpleasant to the wearer's comfort. "The treble man-garment-environment represents a unique system, determining the comfort conditions and implicitly the using value of a garment structure" [16].

The texture has an influence that involves the tactile sensibility of the skin. By their rigidity, the thickness or softness of the threads, by the roughness of surface, the garments irritate or not the nervous papillae, leading to the alteration of the capillary circulation on the surface they cover or they come in contact with. From this point of view, silk is kind to the wearer – the expression "body friendly" has been used lately. The aspect of the texture influences the tactile sense – the stroke. Before ungumming, natural silk is rugged with a rather rough stroke. After removing the sericin, it regains its softness and smoothness, gaining the stroke we appreciate in a garment. Soft and smooth, it is "gentle" to the wearer's skin as a result of its rich composition in amino-acids; this aspect can not be equaled by any other fiber.

We analyzed the specific weight after the students' mention of silk using the term "light". The comparative table of different types of natural fibers in the Professor Stan Mitu's work [17], points out the specific weight of the natural fibers that are mostly used for making garments (Fig. 2). Among the natural fibers, the animal ones have the specific weight smaller than the vegetable ones. Even though wool has the specific weight smaller than that of natural silk due to its pronounced porosity, silk can meet the wearer's more complex physiological requirements. The location was made at the level of the raw fibers.



**Fig. 2. The comparative report of the specific weights of the textile, natural fibres often used for garments.**

I have previously talked about the wearer's comfort more or less affected by the material characteristics. The term comfort makes us think of the psychological motivation of the garment. A comfortable garment by its materiality and form positively affects the mental state of the wearer and it will guarantee the wearer a physical comfort and a visual comfort to the viewer. In this interaction wearer-viewer, the communicative function of the garment plays its role regarding the wearer's psycho-physiological state. As a result of the things

mentioned above, silk is associated with a delicate aspect and a suitable stroke, as the fibre closest to the delicacy and sensibility of the skin is included in the garment.

Paradoxically, it is the strongest natural textile fiber. It ennobles the body that dresses, its charm being given not only by the brightness but also glitter and reflex. It is a vivid fabric that embraces the human body with pleasure.

The researches carried out in the recent years have raised the question of the dressing ensemble more and more conspicuously. It is seen as a “complex physiological and psychological state in which the man does not go through external disturbances meant to prevent him from his activity or rest” [17]. The comfort state is not something that can be noticed, the wearer can notice only its absence, or, on the contrary, the appearance of the discomfort state. “The sensations produced by the tight clothes represent a factor in determining the entire comfort created by a piece of clothing. When a person is not psychologically influenced by the worn item it is considered to be a comfort state from a sensorial point of view, a neutral state.” [17]

The form and amplexness of the garment determines the immediate sphere that surrounds the body. The resulting effect combines with that of the inherent properties of the fabrics, so that, in the light of clothing comfort, “the only free variable is the dressing ensemble ... such a requirement of maximum comfort of the clothing items leads in a compulsory way to the clothing scientifically researched and designed” [17] on the grounds that are related first of all to the wearer’s comfort and implicitly on his mental state, in case it is affected by garment. Each textile materiality has a certain technical design. The ratio between material and technique finds its expression in draping the silk garment in the same way in which the technique makes the form live in matter. Silk, and I mean fabric here, is characterized by an important draping ability that confers comfortable feelings to the wearer. The bigger the draping ability of the fabric, the more positive the state of mental comfort felt by the wearer and the viewer [17]. It is said that silk has a powerful communicative energy.

Based on these reasons, fashion designers have focused their attention in the last years on exploiting all the properties of the natural silk in garment. Beyond the economical limits – as it is an expensive fiber because it is still produced in a few places in the world, most of it is imported as a fabric from Japan and China – the psycho-physiological criteria come first when choosing silk as the most suitable materiality for the human body.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In the garment avatars, silk had, as a textile materiality, a historical development determined by social-communicative factors with a powerful impact on hierarchical societies so that its beneficial effect on the wearer’s psycho-physiology can be acknowledge during the present times. In the relation between garment and the tegument of the human body as a breathing organ by means of which the breathing exchange with the environment is between 0.5 and 1%, the regularization of the body temperature is important when creating and preserving the thermal comfort of the organism. To this adds the necessity of free movement of the air on the surface of the skin and a “friendly” contact of the garment. Answering to all these demands of the human corporality, the natural silk becomes the second skin, able to ensure the psycho-physiological comfort of the wearer conscious of the garment importance. Nowadays, the undisputable qualities of the natural silk fibers bring about conducting new programs on European and international level in order to revive the natural silk industry and increase the accessibility for the large mass of population, aiming at the psycho-physiological aspect of the person wearing the silk garment in accordance with the perspectives of lasting development.

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