

**THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ART OF BUCHAREST  
FACULTY OF DECORATIVE ARTS AND DESIGN**

***SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS***

**PORT PRINT. FASHION AND POSTMODERNISM.**

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## KEY WORDS

fashion	fast-fashion	y generation
real outfit	multiculturalism	mass culture
imagine-garment	historical inspiration	challenge
written-outfit	street fashion	postmodernism
accessory	feminism	postmodernism modernity
innovative idea	fashionable regulations	neo-tribalism
fashion diffusion	the role of the garment	interactivity
image	imitation	hyper-technologization
role of the model	differentiation	confusion
the status of luxury	human model	polyvalent and multidimensional identities
the ugly	fashion victim	individualism
the obscene	anti-conformism	anti-aesthetics
caricature	punk style	fragmentation
good-taste	fashion fetish	eclecticism
the new	androgenization	juxtaposition
versatility	unisex fashion	lack of meaning
the exciting	building identity	the disappearance of hierarchies
incoherence	luxury market.	removing from context
fashion tyranny	luxury consumer	individualism
anti-fashion	consumerism	deconstruction
democratization of fashion	ultracosumerism	DIY
haute couture	new technologies	tribute
ready-to-ware	internet culture	

irony

trompe l'oeil

structuralism

digital printing

post-structuralism

emancipation of minorities

Dadaism

dandysm

intersexuality

seduction

logo

copy

appropriation

self citation

quote

neo-retro

vintage

hipster

up cycling

simulacrum

hyper-reality

hazard

collage

reality as art

kitsch

advertisement

photo

consumer

simulation of reality

real/virtual

illusory reality

## **PORT PRINT. FASHION AND POSTMODERNISM.**

The work, doctoral thesis, titled “Port Print. Fashion and Postmodernism”<sup>1</sup> represents a theoretical and artistic knowledge research on the phenomenon of fashion and its placement in Postmodernism, a contextualized scientific-artistic analysis based on a comparative study of my own fashion collections related to the evolution of contemporary fashion.

The work is structured in four chapters, preceded by the “Introduction” and ended with the “Conclusion”; the body of the paper is accompanied by bibliography, glossary of terms, list of illustrations and annexes.

The thesis consists of a theoretical inquiry centered on the study of fashion as a cultural and social phenomenon (Chapters 1 and 2) and its insertion in Postmodernism (Chapter 3). The work is illustrated with my own artistic activity (Chapter 4).

The study has as target goal the observation and analysis of the general course of the society in the last 40 years. So, the present paper explains the evolution of the fashion phenomenon as an interface of historical development and clarifies aspects of fashion tendencies often difficult to understand.

In the near future I intend to publish the PhD thesis titled “Port Print. Fashion and Postmodernism” in the form of two distinct volumes, that is “Fashion as a Cultural and Social Phenomenon” and “Fashion and Postmodernism”. These two future volumes aim to clarify the understanding of the fashion phenomenon and its insertion into the present society. The volumes concern both the students of Fashion Design Departments within the Art Universities, but also the profane readers.

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<sup>1</sup> Because in the Romanian language the word Port has two meanings the title of the work could be translated as follows: “A printed garment or I wear a print. Fashion and Postmodernism”

The whole project centers upon a theoretical approach of the fashion phenomenon, richly supported by specific examples characteristic to each issue discussed in the four chapters, both through images belonging to other artists' or designers' works, and by images illustrating my personal artistic activity in the last six years, based on the illusion of reality offered by the digital print.

The first chapter, "Fashion as a Cultural System", defines the fashion term and the origins of the phenomenon, describing fashion ethically, the propagation of fashion, the notion of good taste or poor taste in fashion, the constant search for the new, the democratization of fashion and the revolt against fast-fashion, the inspiration sources of fashion and the spirit of times.

The second chapter, "Fashion and Society", explains fashion as a social phenomenon, its regulations throughout history, the functions of the garment as mechanisms of social dynamics, the role of imitation and differentiation, the conflict between them, luxury marketing, the consumerism and the new ultra-consumerism, the Internet culture, the Y generation and the challenge within the consumer society.

The third chapter, "Fashion in the Postmodernist context", speaks about the mentalities and new contours of the postmodern world, about art and fashion in the postmodern era and about postmodern aesthetics and techniques.

The last chapter, "The power of image and the costume illusion" represents my personal contribution at the present study, represented mainly by my fashion collections, understood with the help of trompe l'oeil, photo and digital print.

In terms of these goals, we can understand that at any particular historical moment, fashion is part of a discourse on health, beauty and sexuality, on nation, economy, art and local specifics.. The techniques Freud used to analyze dreams can be put in analogy with fashion interpretation: firstly, symbolically, fashion is a relic of an older identity; secondly, at the decoding level, fashion is a vehicle of signs that need to be translated to be understood. Similar to the

interpretation of dreams, in fashion there is no fixed significance of the signs. Any person, any object, any relationship may mean something totally different depending on the context. While Modernism valued the essence, the real, the substantial to the detriment of the ephemeral, the imaginary and the subjectivity, the Postmodernism engaged itself precisely in questioning the latter aspects and their transcendental functions.

The Postmodernism as a term has been widely used over the past two decades, but the attempt to identify a precise meaning of the term that covers a larger period is, indeed, difficult. Literally, the term *postmodernism* means "after the modernist movement," but the postmodernism is more than that. The Postmodernism is a flexible term, that can cover a wide range of artistic forms. The theoreticians and critics use postmodernism to describe broadly the change of paradigm that began to appear in literature, theater, architecture, cinematography, visual arts and design beginning with the mid-twentieth century.

Initially, the Postmodernism represented a reaction to the Modernism, and most theoreticians defined it in contrast with the Modernism. One of the first and most important theorists of the Postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard, philosopher and French literary theorist, launched this concept following a study on American society of the years 1960 and 1970. This study was demanded by the Canadian government. Jean-François Lyotard considers the Postmodernism as the aesthetic expression of a recurring state of emerging Modernism.

And in the field of art, where the concept is perceived rather as a style or a trend, the Postmodernism challenges the traditional cultural values, especially those of Western society. Artistic manifestations in Postmodernism rethink the relationship between art and folk culture and reconsider the differences between the art work and other consumer goods.

Thus, in Postmodernism, there is no distinction between the forms of *high and low art*. For example, in the past, some aesthetic forms of art were

stereotypically considered to be “feminine”, as it was the case of fashion, and therefore were judged as being inferior to forms of artistic expression considered “masculine”, for example, architecture. In Postmodernism there is no such distinction that imposes the status of different forms of artistic expression. This trend has led to the emancipation of the arts considered "decorative", thus less valuable, in Modernism, fashion being one of them. Now, fashion is valued by the status given by its creator or bearer, garments are no longer associated with the type of social hierarchy as it once was, and the body no longer has now a signifié (meaning) unique and invariable, as the violation of all previous rules is the best guide to understand the significance of postmodern. This can be explained by the fact that today, life is radically different from what it was fifty or even thirty years ago. Traditional values of marriage and family were put into crisis by women's emancipation, by their desire to have an equal status with men at work, and by their decision to set up a family only at older ages. A lot of couples choose not to have children at all. Religion, also, has less impact on society than before, becoming almost irrelevant to many people.

Thus, Postmodernism become a description of the changes that took place in the contemporary society and culture. The terms of postmodernism and postmodern infiltrated into common language as an abridged reference to a vague and general contemporary spirit of time, the German “zeitgeist”.

Differences between modernity and post modernity can also be understood from another perspective. Modernity is the era of industrial revolution, when people’s lives were influenced by the machines mass production. Post-modernity, defined as the era after the modernism, was characterized firstly by the excess of individualization and subjectivity. If the modernity conceived the object in terms of production, the post-modernity conceived it in terms of consumption. This means that all forms of art are made for the sole purpose of being "consumed", the main objective of postmodernism being to attract a wider audience. The consensus between postmodernism and

fashion is based on the common elements of innovation, originality and the cult of difference.

The Post-modernity is a world in progress of post-industrial globalization of media, communication and information systems. It is a world oriented towards the consumer market, rather than labor and production, a world of culture, where tradition, consensual values and universal beliefs were challenged, undermined and rejected in favor of heterogeneity and differentiation. Thus, the consumer-public feels a vivid desire for new things and the latest model of fashion. In most cases, the cultural and emotional value given by the fashion fluctuations of a garment is now more important than the actual use value (market value in the era of modernity). In other words, a clothing item is worth more when it is part of the latest fashion collection and when it is wanted by as many buyers as possible. Once another new product appears, the public interest moves and the financial value decreases.

In Postmodernism, the market becomes the market of symbols more than a merchandise market and fashion is concerned more of the image than of the garment itself. The postmodern era emphasizes the difference and subjectivity so much that there is no real good and bad. This creates confusion and generates what is known as the "postmodern crisis of meaning," where people are overwhelmed by options and do not know what to choose or whether their choice will be considered good or poor taste.

It is surprising to discover how important the concept of taste has become in today's everyday life. Nowadays, people feel humiliated to be labeled as having a 'poor taste'. The discussion about the aesthetic refinement was a central issue in the cultural debates of the last three centuries. It is interesting that in the last decades the debate about refinement seems to have focused almost exclusively on the fashion world. For more than a century, taste is no longer a criterion for judgment and interpretation of Art (understanding the classical genres of art), but it was present in all this period of time in the

discussion about fashion and design, a field that has now become the sole redeem of this aesthetic criteria.

In the fashion collections I have developed over the last years I tried to reach, as directly and efficiently possible, the issue of the aesthetic taste in fashion and the message delivered by an outfit. Inspired by customers who were facing difficulties in composing a right image that aspires to the status of "well dressed", I had the idea of offering them, as a solution to their problems, an accessorized outfit " ready made" ( in analogy to objet toute faite and ready-made) to protect them from making clothing errors. So, I launched a new concept redefining the ready to wear clothes (prêt-à-porter) by turning them in ready-to-wear outfits using the trompe l'oeil prints, representing the image of some mannequins wearing creations and accessories created and / or composed by me. Beyond its aesthetic and utilitarian dimensions, my approach is perfectly suitable to be read through the conceptual postmodernist grid, which is illustrated in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of the PhD thesis.

The Postmodernism includes all forms of art, even those that have until recently been considered non-art. Fashion is one of these new forms of creation that has been integrated in the great art only in Postmodernism. Not always seen as "Art" and still disapproved, in this context, by many lovers of traditional art, fashion embodies many of the key elements of Postmodernism, fact proved by the latest fashion collections seen on the international catwalks. Beside famous designers, representatives of the Postmodernism, as Maison Martin Margiela, Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood, Comme des Garçons, and Chalayan Hussein, lately, more and more young designers have been influenced by postmodernism in their collections. They build the future of the fashion from its past. Nothing seems to be too controversial for the current audience, everything was already seen and done. This is about Postmodernism – the acceptance of multiple opinions and options that bring different explanations for any issue.

Following in my study the Postmodernism and how this influences fashion, I found that there is much more behind a stitch or a cut than what can be perceived aesthetically. Each fabric, each line drawn by the designer, each sewn button (or not) are planned, destined to be "deconstructed" by the theoretician or art critic /fashionist considering the most insignificant detail as a bearer of cultural significance. Fashion itself is the illustration of Postmodernism, it is the echo of the world we live in today. From eclecticism and pastiche, to parody and deconstruction, fashion designers constantly use the new and the old to create new looks.

Collections are consumer products built on clear market strategies. Through the cultural dynamics of society, the market determines the designers to adopt the postmodern briquetting, using a fusion of cuts or vintage designs and new ideas to create a completely new model. The modern mass production, excessively created, favored the set up of the current postmodern style. Facing with an excess production of clothing, the consumers have begun combining a wide variety of clothing items in different forms.

Being particularly interested in combining and assembling (commonly known as DIY clothing and in adaptability and versatility as postmodern symptoms, these characteristics are defining **for my brand**.

**DIY clothing** involves the combination of elements, sometimes anonymous, giving them new goals and meanings. Unlike pastiche, which is rather an ad literam imitation of the old for its intrinsic historical and cultural value, the DIY clothing is able to provide a new meaning to the elements in the creative context. The designer creates as a D.J. which mixes musical sequences giving rise to new pieces which value consists in the reference to the original already familiar to the public.

In addition to DIY or clothing assemblage, my creations can also be read through other concepts specific to postmodernism. For example, I considered

important ,for the analysis of my creations, in this context, two characteristics of Postmodernism: Hyper-reality and Pastiche.

The dresses I create are perfect semblances. They resemble clones and holograms, illusions of the double that have always ground the history of the body, feeding the dream of perfect duplication or multiplication of the human being. These pieces copy a reality that have not had an autonomous existence but were created only to serve as a pattern for its copy, that is, the piece of clothing imprinted with the photographic image of the original outfit. Presented as original and real the dress having the image of another dress is an excellent example of hyper reality.

**The Pastiche**, the result of copying the motifs, themes, style or means of expression into a work that imitates the way of working of an author or a school, having a pejorative connotation in Modernism, has become one of the Postmodernism creation strategies. Closed to identification with the quote and often associated with the bricolage (DIY), the pastiche is particularly invoked with reference to post-modern burlesque practices of self-reflexivity and intertextuality. However, in my creations, it is rather a pseudo-pastiche, or better said a self-pastiche, but not in the sense of practicing a convenient mannerism, but in an action of recovering my own creative resources and of capitalizing the inheritance offered by the history of costume, registered in the trend of contemporary culture.

The melancholy is now a great deal: from art-deco posters to flappers of the 20's, diners and rockabillics of the 50's, or mini skirts of the 60's, all have been resumed and will continue to inspire the fashion industry from time to time. Lately, several attempts have been made to understand and theorize the retro style. Current fashion lives on the boom of melancholy, replicating patterns, motives or even original clothing items of the past. All these have taken as starting point the accelerated tendency, appeared in the early 80's, to "rob" the history by the key elements of fashion, apparently gathered in an

eclectic way and governed by hazard. Some have seen this as part of the interest in the melancholy that is in vogue, while others have interpreted it as a modality to bring history into the present that is an-historical. A further explanation of this emotional attachment to the past fashion (especially the period between 1920-1980) is also the economic crisis and the social disorders of recent years, that have determined in the population's mental the melancholy for the periods of economic boom and welfare of the years 1920 or 1960-1970.

Regarding my fashion collections, the quotes from fashion history and the insertions of vintage elements must be seen in the wider context of postmodern culture. In the Spring-Summer 2013 Collection, I used mostly straight, wide, (bag dresses type), sleeveless with V-decolletage, or straight necked, low-waist, marked, and sometimes fringe-decorated dresses, that explicitly refer to fashion of the 20s.

Other models use classic drapes that remind of the ancient Greek peplos or the vaporous dresses with deep cleavages and bare backs that send to the typology of the evening dresses of the 30s-40s. On the other hand, the palette of quotes and references at the level of the imagined clothes and printed on clothes is much more abundant: from the lace collars and the metallic material, typical of the 90s, to the high waist jeans pants of the 80s, wide dresses with floral prints characteristic of hippie fashion of the 60s, to the corset girdle, the black lace, the fur head and the glove to the elbow, which refer to the 19th-century fashionable sequences, and retaken in the 30s -40s.

Another fundamental concept characteristic for postmodernism, very important in the interpretation of my creative approach, is the appropriation. In the broad sense, the appropriation is the use of objects (realities) or preexisting images in the construction of new works. The appropriation can be defined as the use of borrowed elements to create a new art work. In visual arts, to come closer means to adopt, to borrow, to recycle fragments or integral forms of visual and material culture created by human being. The first forms of

appropriation are considered Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades. Other appropriation strategies include the re-viewing, revaluation, variation, version, interpretation, imitation, improvisation, and especially plagiarism, copying, pastiche, paraphrase, parody, allusion, and inter-textuality.

In the appropriation concept were included, besides Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, the Cubist Collages of Pablo Picasso and Georges Bracque, Dadaist creations of André Breton, Tristan Tzara, or Francis Picabia, Kurt Schwitters's *Merz*, the *objets trouvés* of the Surrealists, then, beginning with the 50s, Robert Rauschenberg's combines and Jasper Johns's works, the neodada productions of the Fluxus movement in the 60s and 70s, and during the same period, the pop art realized by Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg and especially Andy Warhol.

The proper term *appropriation art* was first used in the 1980, in relation with Sherrie Levine, who approached the act of appropriation as an artistic theme in itself. Levine often quotes works of other authors in her own works, for example by photographing Walker Evans' photos.

Challenging the idea of originality and drawing attention to the relationship between power, gender, consumerism and the value of commodities or sources and the use of art, Levine plays with the theme "almost identical."

During the 1970 and 1980, Richard Prince reshot advertisements such as those from Marlboro cigarettes or photographs from magazines and newspapers. Other artists that used the concept of appropriation in the same period are: Joseph Kosuth, Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, Greg Colson, and Malcolm Morley.

In the 90s, artists continued to produce art by appropriation, using this environment to tackle the theories and social issues, rather than focusing on the works themselves. Damian Loeb used the film and cinema to comment on the themes of simulation and reality. Other well-known visual artists who have approached this type of art lately are Christian Marclay, Deborah Kass and Damien Hirst.

Broadly speaking, any type of product is subject to appropriation. As a social practice, appropriation functions in different fields of change and power structures in the social domain, and therefore is a complex phenomenon. The contribution of appropriation to the evolution of world cultures is closely related to the way in which the cultural, conceptual and material ties are built. These links open channels of cultural interaction.

Fashion design is an important channel of cultural exchanges, as it presents the objects of a social interaction system without the necessity for geographical proximity of cultures. Elaborating a design that includes a cultural element in a product implies cultural appropriation practices. The appropriation of cultural elements in their particular contexts to be created or recreated in fashion translates the value of the cultural element into an exchange value involving a reading code. In design, *the code* by which different commodities, with multiple exchange values are marketed, is produced as a social concept having a merchandise value. The Code sets out cultural stereotypes by encoding the selected features of a culture in a series of products and the limits of the designer's capabilities to launch commodities in the market with an original cultural content. Using the cultural quote in my work, such as the Adidas logos, the Photo Magazine cover, the tricoloured ribbon, the Chanel chain decorative motif (Chanel chain), is rather playful and ironic, discharged by ideological and political connotations that these visual references may have.

The research presented in this paper aims to understand how appropriation can be used as a critical strategy to explore ways to formulate significant cultural exchange channels through fashion design. My research allows alternative ways of operation for the design by the appropriation to the social and cultural field. On the other hand, this research aims to investigate how the design capabilities of intervention, translation, mediation and negotiation of relationships can be discussed in relation to global dynamics that configures production and consumption patterns. The fashion-design based on research

offers a field of investigation where the reading and interpretation code can be instituted and debated, not as a form of commodity but as a form of cultural negotiation.

In order to develop appropriation as a strategy for the creative process, the fashion designer must understand the appropriation dynamics as a social activity and delimit its sources of visual citation. In my case, the situation is even more complex, as I use both cultural quotes and from fashion history to build the outfits which in their turn are quoted in the prints of the finished clothes, so that we can talk about self-citation . Researching these aspects, I have found it is important to define those structures and clothing combinations that constitute the primary outfit, the object of the quotation, by resorting to elements in the recent fashion history in order to identify a pattern of evolution and to compare with the current process of fashion transformation.

The researcher therefore aims to create an alternative path of evolution through DIY, pastiche, appropriation and by elaborating the reading code that restores the value of the original element in the proposed final design. The creative process in the fashion sector has the potential to provoke the destiny of the cultural consumer goods having the authority to decide on the value of a cultural element in society. Through its critical involvement, fashion design has the ability to sensitize the public in respect to cultural transformation processes and also to draw attention to its essential role in determining the meaning of human society's evolution.

All these postmodern codes of reading and interpretation of the fashion phenomenon in general and of my collections in particular can be found in my entire artistic professional activity. In order to have a clearer picture of the period that mirrors this doctoral thesis, I want to say that each year involves two seasons, spring-summer and autumn-winter. Each season also includes a ready-to-wear collection, consisting of 120-150 models, and a collection titled Black with more elegant designs, consisting in 80-100 models. To this is added a

children collection (60-80 models) and one of underwear (30-50 models); 350 models per season, 700 models per year, 4200 models in the period 2012-2018, presented annually at 10 international fairs and totaling, for the above mentioned period, 60 participations in international exhibitions.

In “ Conclusion” I emphasized the main ideas of the work regarding the theoretical perspective and postmodern practices in fashion and in personal creation.

The bibliography contains specialized volumes and articles necessary for research such as the works of the authors who studied the phenomenon of fashion.

In the Appendices I have presented both pictures that I considered to illustrate the most the link between fashion, culture, society and art, as well as pictures of personal works from 2012-2018, which illustrates the most representative features of Postmodernism.