

National Ornament and the Imperial Masquerade

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National ornament and the imperial masquerade

Review of:

Rebecca Houze, *Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria–Hungary before the First World War: Principles of Dress*, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015, 384 pp., 79 col. plates, 109 b. & w. illus., £85.00 hdbk ISBN 978-1-4094-3668-3.

Nóra Veszprémi

In October 1859, the Hungarian magazine *Nefelejts* issued a plea to Hungarian ladies on behalf of the National Museum. Signed by a certain ‘Mr E. S.’, the article suggested that ladies contribute to the furnishing of the museum building by fitting it out with fifty-four chairs, each embroidered with the coat of arms of one of the fifty-four counties of Hungary.¹ The construction of the building had been finished in 1847, but the turmoils of the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence and the ensuing years of absolutism had drawn attention away from the museum. Although its exhibitions were reopened in 1851, the institution was severely underfunded by the imperial government that now half-heartedly maintained it, and the building was far from welcoming in its barely furnished state. Consequently, Mr E. S.’s idea was immediately taken up by a group of aristocratic ladies who quickly managed to enlist women from different counties to support the cause, either by donating money or by contributing their own embroidering skills. The plan was given much encouragement in the press: newspapers and magazines reported on new developments regularly, and eventually expressed deep disappointment when the plan did not come into fruition after all.²

Even if unrealised, this plan is a good example of the important role of embroidery and textiles in Austro-Hungarian public life, especially in terms of the participation of women. Unlike an ultimately passive act like a donation of funds (which the aristocratic women who initiated the project could and did engage in), it gave the ladies a chance for creative participation in the creation of a national institution, while also fostering collaboration in a political climate that tended to discourage charities and other congregations of citizens. Furthermore, the project had implications that stretched beyond questions of gender. While many aristocrats still pursued painting as an amateurish pastime, the ladies would most probably never have thought of donating their products in that field to the museum. Fine art was, by the mid-nineteenth-century, seen as something that – at least in its museum-

¹ *Nefelejts*, 23 October 1859.

² ‘(A *Nefelejts*ben E. S. ur)’, in: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 6 November 1859; ‘A P. Napló írja...’, in: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 13 November 1859; ‘Levelezések’, in: *Delejtű*, 13 December 1859, 398; ‘Közintézetek és egyletek’, in: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 8 April 1860; ‘Levelezések’, in: *Delejtű*, 11 September 1860, 292

worthy form – required professional skills, while the applied arts³ – and among them, especially, textiles – still provided a space where amateurism and professionalism, popular and ‘refined’ art, as well as the culture of the home and that of the museum could merge and intersect in fruitful and unexpected ways.

This is the territory that Rebecca Houze’s book, *Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria-Hungary before the First World War* sets out to explore. In doing so, it cuts through the usual art historical boundaries between different media and draws parallels between embroideries, clothes and paintings, regarding them as products of the same cultural and historical developments. This approach has a special importance in the case of this particular scholarly field. As the author explains in her thorough and well-argued introductory chapter, the art and culture of fin-de-siècle Vienna tends to be reflected in the lens of the traditional, French-centred narrative of modernism as a belated anomaly, not least because of the way it often merged the fine and the applied arts and encouraged ornamental tendencies. Consequently, this field of study requires a conceptual framework that is able to integrate fine art with artistic craft, while putting aside the ‘traditional interpretations of modernism’ that find ‘its form in ever more flattened and abstracted fields of color’ (p. 9). Houze achieves this by focusing on problems such as the role that museums, exhibitions, ethnographic studies, and, last but not least, nationalism – or, to be more precise, nationalisms in different parts of the Empire – played in shaping the movement of design reform and constructing new concepts such as that of ‘house industry.’ This also means that the scope of the book extends beyond ‘Vienna 1900’ in a narrower sense. Moreover, even though Houze is quite frank about the limits of her project in her *Introduction* and explains that the book focuses on the German- and Hungarian-speaking regions due to the linguistic competences of its author (p. 14), she does, briefly but carefully, look at other regions when necessary; hence, the book as a whole is successful in evoking the complex web of cultural cross-fertilization that was the multi-cultural Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a study of mutual influences, it transcends the traditional approach that would focus on the borrowing of motifs in textile design; instead, it deals with the fluctuation and transformation of ideas between cities, regions and national cultures.

The topic investigated in Houze’s study is many sided and complex, as reflected by the somewhat meandering structure of the book itself. The author makes this explicit at the very beginning of the *Introduction*, where she acknowledges the diversity of the ‘stories’ the book tells while also defining the central problem around which those diverse threads are woven: the *Bekleidungsprinzip*, or ‘principle of dress’, put forward in the theoretical writings of Gottfried Semper, one of the book’s key figures (p. 2). Writing about architecture, Semper drew a parallel between the ornamentation of buildings and people’s clothes, describing them as both material cover and linguistic signifier, something that ‘cloaks, disguises, displays and transforms’. Walls, just like clothes, serve to separate a part of space – or a certain individual – from the outside world, defining them in the process; in fact, according to Semper’s theory, textiles as spatial dividers

³ Rebecca Houze uses the term ‘design’ in her book, while acknowledging its somewhat anachronistic nature in her careful analysis of terminology in the *Introduction* (p. 9).

preceded stone or brick walls and can be regarded as their original, more natural form. This is the idea that connects the topics examined in the book, which is made up of two parts. In the first part, Houze investigates various, interconnected fields that were strongly influenced by Semper's ideas: the formation of museum collections of applied arts, the display of textiles at exhibitions, and the new ideas concerning design education and folk crafts. The second part looks at the results of the ensuing reform programme in fin-de-siècle Vienna, while focusing on another aspect of the *Bekleidungsprinzip*: dress as a purveyor of meanings, as an expression of personality, nation or class. While the first part places a strong emphasis on interactions between Vienna and Budapest, as well as the influence of the new trends across the Empire, the second part is set mainly in Vienna, providing a new context for well-known phenomena such as the Wiener Werkstätte, while also shedding light on several important, but rarely discussed figures – many of them women –, who are usually overshadowed by the better-known icons of 'Vienna 1900'. It seems to be a matter of conscious choice that the structure of the book does not give the impression of a traditional, thoroughly rounded monograph and thus of completeness: instead of separate, but equal slices of a pie, the chapters are more like elements of an embroidered arabesque winding forward, then coiling back, sometimes repeating motifs, but also picking up new ones as it proceeds. This structure is sometimes hard to follow (for instance when a 9-page chapter that starts off with the 1908 *Kaiser-Huldigungs-Festzug* goes on to analyse Oskar Kokoschka's first Expressionist book illustrations and finally morphs into a discussion of the Zsolnay ceramic tiles adorning Ödön Lechner's 1896 Budapest Museum of Applied Arts; see pp. 265–274), but it has its own logic. This unique logic will, however, only emerge in the process of careful reading (the chapter mentioned above fits into Houze's discussion of how motifs of folk art essentially became parts of the costumes of the 'imperial masquerade' – both on clothes and buildings, in line with the *Bekleidungsprinzip*).

In the first part of the book, Houze's narrative is woven around a few well-chosen focal points. She begins by telling the parallel stories of the foundation of the Museums of Applied Arts in Vienna (1864) and Budapest (1872, but with a prehistory reaching back to the mid-sixties).⁴ The fact that Semper's theories played a key role in these developments will come as no surprise to those interested in the early history of design museums, but the implications Houze traces are fascinating and less self-evident. Semper's model of the historical development of arts focused on material and technology, as opposed to art historical narratives of style, and – contrary to romantic nationalist ideas – it did not care much for national difference, instead searching for the most basic principles of human artistic production. Nevertheless, when these theories were taken up by museologists and design reformers as practical guidance, they sometimes became imbued with additional implications that could provide a basis for distinguishing between nations, as well as for distinctions of gender. This is particularly evident in the work of Jakob von

⁴ An inaccuracy regarding the history of the Budapest museum has to be pointed out here: Jenő Radisics was appointed its director in 1896, and not in 1882 as the book claims (p. 46), although he had worked there as a curator since 1881. The director between 1881 and 1896 was György Ráth.

Falke, curator at the Vienna Museum of Applied Arts and organiser of the exhibitions of National House Industry and the *Pavilion der Frauenarbeit* at the 1873 Universal Exhibition in Vienna. As Houze explains: 'Whereas Semper imbued the Bekleidungsprinzip with global, trans-historical, and ultimately cosmological significance, Falke perceived dress as a particularly domestic, commercial, and feminine domain.' (p. 43) These developments are not surprising in a cultural climate that saw industrialization as a terrain where countries and nations could compete, each showing off its advancedness (an internationally prevalent idea that had given birth to universal exhibitions in the first place). The development of a domestic industry that could compete on a worldwide stage was a vital and much discussed topic in the Empire, and textiles had a strategic importance in that quest. Embroidery and weaving were, on the one hand, regarded as less-than-subtle pastimes of peasants and women, but on the other hand, the quality of their products was seen as essential to national growth. This duality gave rise to attempts at 'design reform' – essentially, a movement that aimed to teach their own craft to those who were practising it, to help them raise it to a higher standard. As the ladies of the city were encouraged to embroider new motifs based on the designs of folk textiles collected by the reformers, the patronising attitude towards both urban and rural craftswomen is evident. At the same time, however, embroidery and weaving allowed women to gradually become professional and autonomous members of the art world, as demonstrated by the examples of Josef Hoffmann's female pupils at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in the second part of the book. In a similar way, design reform bridged the gulf between the elite and the popular arts. The term *Hausindustrie* was coined in this process: Falke used it to distinguish artefacts produced by peasants for their own use from modern, industrial fashion, but also from 'folk art' objects made for tourists, for show. He put these objects, supposedly born hidden from the touristy gaze of outsiders, on show at the 1873 Universal Exposition, where they could be gazed at not only by visiting *flâneurs*, but also by the designers and producers whom they were supposed to inspire. This was one impetus that set off the programmes of needlework reform examined in the following chapter of the book. The embroidery schools (*Fachschulen für Kunststickerei*) founded in various regions of the Empire by Emilie Bach and Therese Mirani were supposed to be beneficial to the economy by fostering the production of high-quality *Hausindustrie* goods, while also helping on a smaller scale by providing employment to peasant and lower-class women. These endeavours, in which the strands of commercialism, philanthropy, nationalism and ethnographic interest are impossible to separate, also formed part of the wider efforts to unify the Empire and to promote its rich amalgam of various national cultures as one greater whole. No wonder the *Fachschulen* teaching various crafts were often regarded with suspicion by artists who sought to promote the national identities of their individual ethnic groups within the Empire.

This aspect becomes important once we realize that the search for indigenous motifs and techniques in local crafts was not simply motivated by the utilitarian goal of raising the standards of modern domestic industry, but also by the essentially romantic search for national ornament: the quest for an imagery that would distinguish the products of one's own nation from all others. This goal

proved to be much less self-evident for Austrian scholars and artists than for members of other ethnic groups in the Empire. The latter, after all, had a clear agenda – to distinguish their own group from all others –, but Austrian identity could not exist separately from imperial identity, which was supposed to encompass all the nations who inhabited the territory ruled by the Emperor. The nationalisms of the individual provinces and the imperialism of the central government in Vienna intersected in complicated ways, and the insightful and often enlightening account the book provides of these relationships is in my opinion one of its most valuable contributions to its field of study. Houze's sensitive approach shows how the same things could look different depending on the point of view. For instance, the late-nineteenth-century Hungarian effort to find traces of ancient 'national ornament' in folk textiles can easily be interpreted in the context of Hungarian nationalism, as a phenomenon related to the tendency that Hungarian literary history calls 'populism' (an ideology that sought to 'revive' high art and at the same time make it accessible to wider audiences by gaining inspiration from folk culture), but in an imperial context it gains new meanings. The organisers of the ethnographic displays at the 1885 Hungarian National Exhibition, Etelka Gyarmathy, Ottó Herman, József Huszka, and János Jankó, may have been partly led by the romantic wish to prove the ancient Eastern origins of the Hungarians, but as part of an industrial exhibition this display was not just about the past, or about the romantic conceptualization of an eternal and pure peasant culture, but also about the future: the very practical goal of raising the standards of industry. This is made clear by the Austrian responses to the Hungarian display. As an example, Houze quotes Alois Riegl, who wrote in 1889 that 'Hungary's ability to incorporate folk art into modern industry 'held the key' to understanding the relationship between commercial manufacture and rural life in the Austrian half of the Monarchy'. (p. 92) Austrian reviews of the 1885 National Exhibition praised products of Hungarian industry influenced by motifs from folk art (such as the products of the Zsolnay ceramics factory) and fawned over the excellence of Hungarian house industry, untouched by industrial civilization (Houze quotes the review by Josef Folnesics, curator at the Vienna Museum of Applied Arts, see p. 85). Seen in this light, Hungary, with its populist tendencies and frantic search for indigenous, national tradition – something that, in Austrian minds, often was conceptualised as an exotic backwardness – becomes the catalyst of progress and modernisation. With all its insistence on 'national art', which resulted in the construction of a solid and long-lived national narrative for art and literature, the populism of Hungarian cultural nationalism was a phenomenon born out of Hungary's relationship with Austria; this seemingly defiant, autonomous tendency always kept the corner of its eye on that hegemonic neighbour. Houze's reconstruction of this relationship calls attention to the transnational aspects of nationalism – something that cannot be stressed often enough. That said, I feel that while the book's analysis of one side of the coin – the Austrian connections of the Hungarian studies on national ornament – is very insightful and thought-provoking, it paints those studies themselves with somewhat too broad a brush. It would have been useful to dedicate a few paragraphs to the seminal differences between e. g. Károly Pulszky's and József Huszka's approach to the subject, not

least because they also signify differences in museological principles. Although both of them engaged in the collecting of folk ornament, their starting point was completely different: while Pulszky aimed to investigate Hungarian motifs together with motifs from all over the world in his search for ancient, universal forms in a Semperian sense, Huszka's goal was to identify national characteristics. Pulszky also posited that the more complicated, flowery motifs of Hungarian folk embroideries had originated from elite art of the 17th and 18th centuries: he saw these textiles as products of the popularization of the Baroque. By contrast, Huszka regarded all of the characteristic motifs of Hungarian folk art as products of the Hungarian 'folk spirit', bestowing on them the glory of ancientness – an ahistorical view that was duly criticized by contemporary historians. These debates have been explored in detail by Hungarian art historian Katalin Sinkó, whose work intersects with the topic of this book in many respects. By drawing on her publications, which examine the question of 'national ornament' in relation to the establishment of design and ethnographical museums in Budapest and Vienna, in the context of Semper's and Riegl's ideas, Houze's discussion of these debates could have been made more nuanced.⁵

We have seen above how 'backwardness' could become the catalyst of modernization; this also meant that ethnic and social groups regarded as unsophisticated by the urban intelligentsia – be it peasants, women, Hungarians, or others, depending on the point of view – could become key figures in the modernizing process. Nevertheless, their contribution had to be controlled, analysed and purified by urban reformers to make it worthy and truly 'modern' (the basic idea – the 'elevation' of folk culture to the level of the elite – not being very far from the ideology of Hungarian 'populism'). Although Houze's book focuses on Vienna and Hungary, its scope extends to other areas too, and, even if not delving into detail, the sketchy examples are revealing in regard to the wider context. One case in point is Bosnia-Herzegovina, Austria-Hungary's only real colony; a province that, from 1878, belonged to Austria but was separated from the crown lands by Croatia, which was part of Hungary. The perceived exotic nature of its Ottoman Turkish heritage, as well as the perception that its peasantry was especially 'untouched' by industrial civilization, turned Bosnia-Herzegovina into a goldmine for design reformers (and the allusion of the metaphor 'goldmine' to colonialism is deliberate here). The discovery of Bosnian 'house industry' seemed like a revelation to Austrian design reformers who instantly set out to 'revive' it by setting up schools in Bosnia to teach the inhabitants how to practise their own craft at the highest level. Houze does not discuss Bosnia in detail – that has been done by others

⁵ Most importantly: Katalin Sinkó, 'The Creation of a National Style of Ornamentation at the End of the Nineteenth Century', in: *Hungarian Ceramics from the Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853–2001*, eds Éva Csenkey and Ágota Steinert, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 45–53; Katalin Sinkó, 'Die Entstehung des Begriffs der Volkskunst in den Kunstgewerbemuseen des Zeitalters des Positivismus: Ornament als Nationalsprache', in: *Acta Historiae Artium* 46 (2005), 205–259.

elsewhere –,⁶ but her brief, but well-placed references to that region, as well as others make sure that her main focus is situated in the wider context of the Empire.

As I said above, the way the book's narrative weaves together different national perspectives is, in my opinion, exemplary. The topic of textiles seems to particularly lend itself to this approach, because the tension between Austro-Hungarian national identities was not the only social dynamic by which it was fraught; the topic is also permeated by questions of social class, as well as of gender. The book provides a tangible picture not only of these tensions, but also of the ways in which they intersected, revealing how attitudes towards peasants, women or minorities were in many ways not only analogous, but intertwined. Houze's book is not based on an explicitly feminist methodological and theoretical framework, and her focus is not primarily on female designers as a separate group (see the *Introduction*, p. 8), but the book does emphasize that textiles were mainly products of women's labour, and the implications of this are thoroughly explored. Given the scope of the book, this choice of methodology is wise, as it allows the author to discuss a wider array of aspects than just those of gender. At the same time, I would be interested in reading a subsequent study that analysed this topic using a more pointedly feminist methodology, not just for the sake of the results themselves, but also to find out to what extent the methodology itself – developed through the study of West European and North American art – actually fits. It would be interesting to ask whether the Austro-Hungarian stitch was 'subversive' in a Rozsika Parkerian sense, and if it was, what it was that it subverted – Rebecca Houze's book certainly provides ample food for thought for those who wish to pursue this line of enquiry by showing how the theory and practice of textile production both cut through and solidified hierarchies not only of gender, but also of ethnicity or social class.

Another feminist line of questioning is to situate the book's topic within wider questions of gender in the turn-of-century Empire and its capital: Vienna, the city of Freud, Klimt, Schiele and the fin-de-siècle femme fatale. The second part of the book opens with a chapter called *Embroidery and Anxiety*, which connects the questions of textile production to more general issues of gender, psychoanalysis and modern art – issues that are central to most discussions of Vienna around 1900, but which now retreat from the foreground in order to form a solid backdrop to Houze's discussion of textile production at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, reform dress and interior design. It is refreshing to see the usual focus shift: Gustav Klimt's paintings give up the limelight to embroideries and clothes, their function being to elucidate contemporary anxiety about female sexuality and the subconscious – something that was articulated in an obvious way in works such as Klimt's *Philosophy* and *Medicine*, while being subdued beyond recognition in embroidery patterns and the debates surrounding textile production and reform dress. Nevertheless, as Houze proves with the help of a photo of *Philosophy* exhibited at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, Klimt's scandalous paintings fitted seamlessly among the undulating ornaments designed by the Secessionists: Josef Hoffmann's interiors had similar

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Austria's ethnographic interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina see: Diana Reynolds-Cordileone, 'Displaying Bosnia: Imperialism, Orientalism, and Exhibitionary Cultures in Vienna and Beyond: 1878–1914', in: *Austrian History Yearbook* 46 (2015), 29–50.

erotic content, but there it was 'framed and domesticated' (p. 155). The debates about reform dress, discussed in the next chapter, were also closely connected to the question of the emancipation of women: dress reformers, as Houze notes, 'frequently wrote wryly that women must be able to move before there could be a women's movement' (p. 212). But the reform dress movement had its own ambivalences: 'artistic dress', while promising to free women from the tyranny of the corset, often treated them as pretty objects to be dressed, instead of individuals who can dress themselves.

The last chapter of the book provides a rich evocation of the 'imperial masquerade' – the importance of national costumes (*Trachten*) in the Empire, their use as props in grandiose marches such as the *Festzug* organised by Hans Makart in 1879 and the *Kaiser-Huldigungs-Festzug* that celebrated the jubilee of Franz Joseph in 1908. Houze addresses the similarity of these costumes to the textile walls described by Semper: as signifiers of identity, they operated according to the *Bekleidungsprinzip*. Reconnecting the narrative to the subject of national style and ornament, this chapter also serves as a reminder of the imminent dissolution of the Empire which, although comprising an endless number of identities, never really succeeded in forging an identity of its own – at least according to Robert Musil, whom Houze cites to illustrate the notion of the illusory character of the Empire, a feeling perhaps shared by several intellectuals on the eve of the First World War (p. 289).

The second part of the book is highly enjoyable and informative, and could easily stand on its own as an original analysis of the production of artistic textiles and reform dress in early-twentieth-century Vienna. As part of this book, however, it is at the same time problematic, because it creates a certain kind of imbalance between the two halves of the monograph. While the first part places a particular emphasis on connections and flows of ideas within the multinational Empire, especially between its two constituent states, the second part narrows its focus down to Vienna, only regaining its multinational scope when discussing the processions – again, events staged in Vienna. The author makes it clear in her *Introduction* that this is an intentional feature of the book (see pp. 2–3), and it cannot be doubted that Vienna modernism provides a very fitting and revelatory case study for the ideas discussed in it. Nevertheless, this also has the unfortunate effect of situating Hungary as a kind of premodern backdrop to Vienna's emerging modernism. This impression – one certainly unintended by the author – could have been avoided by weaving Hungarian threads into the narrative in a similar way as in Part 1, which would also have made the structure of the whole book more balanced. The Gödöllő artists' colony, mentioned in relation to artistic dress, could have been discussed further; indeed, a comparison between Gödöllő's folk-art-inspired modernism and that of the Vienna artists would have made an exciting and original contribution to the study of Gödöllő, which is usually discussed in the context of the British Arts and Crafts Movement.⁷ Moreover, the significance of textiles in Hungarian modernism around 1900 stretches further than Gödöllő. Two

⁷ See for instance: Katalin Keserü, 'The Workshops of Gödöllő: Transformations of a Morrisian Theme', in: *Journal of Design History* 1.1 (1988), 1–23; Katalin Gellér, 'Hungarian Art Nouveau and its English Sources', in: *Hungarian Studies* 6.2 (1990), 155–65.

of the most influential modernist painters of the turn of the century, József Rippl-Rónai and János Vaszary seriously engaged with textile design and the works they created are, in their own ways, emblematic of Hungarian Art Nouveau. Rippl-Rónai, who had spent several years in Paris where he associated with the Nabis, was especially proud of a type of 'gobelin-like embroidery' which he supposedly invented; his Nabis-inspired, somewhat Gauguinesque, stained-glass-like scenes were woven into tapestries by his wife, Lazarine Baudrion.⁸ The flowery, embroidered screens that formed part of the dining room he designed for the Budapest palace of Count Tivadar Andrassy in 1897 seem to embody the *Bekleidungsprinzip* perfectly, and a tapestry he made in connection with this commission, *Woman in a Red Dress* – an icon of Hungarian modernism – is a prime example of turn-of-the-century ideas on femininity.⁹ János Vaszary's designs did not always depart so radically from the inspiration of folk art: his *Shepherd Boy* of 1899 is a particularly witty case of a 'textile within a textile' with its representation of the boy's richly embroidered *cifraszűr* (frieze coat); *Ladies Playing*, on the other hand, is a Rococo-inspired rendition of an imaginary *fête galante*.¹⁰ Vaszary collaborated with one of the textile artists of Gödöllő, Sarolta Kovalszky, to produce his designs. Both Vaszary's and Rippl-Rónai's textiles were displayed at international exhibitions such as the 1905 Venice Biennial and the 1906 Universal Exposition in Milan; by this time, it seems, modernism was accepted as part of the image Hungarian cultural politics wished to display to the world. Textiles, however, were also present at the emergence of the more radical avant-garde tendencies of Hungarian modernism. In 1911, at the second exhibition of the avant-garde painters who designated themselves as *Nyolcak* (The Eight), there were in fact more than eight artists on show. One of the extras was Anna Lesznai, an illustrator and applied artist whose

⁸ On Rippl-Rónai's work in the field of design, see Ágnes Prékopa, 'Rippl-Rónai József iparművészeti tevékenysége [József Rippl-Rónai's decorative art]', in: *Rippl-Rónai József gyűjteményes kiállítása* [József Rippl-Rónai's Collected Works], eds Mária Bernáth and Ildikó Nagy, Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 1998, 91–111, English summary: 111–112. Online version:

http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ORSZ_NEMG_kv_52_Rippl/?pg=92&layout=s.

⁹ On the Andrassy dining room see *Rippl-Rónai József gyűjteményes kiállítása*, 464–465 (Cat. No 216), online version:

http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ORSZ_NEMG_kv_52_Rippl/?pg=465&layout=s. On *Woman in a Red Dress* see 472–473. (Cat. No 223), online version:

http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ORSZ_NEMG_kv_52_Rippl/?pg=473&layout=s.

¹⁰ On Vaszary's work in the field of design, see Cecília Óriné Nagy, 'Vaszary János iparművészeti tevékenysége [János Vaszary the Applied Artist]', in: *Vaszary János (1867–1939) gyűjteményes kiállítása* [The collected works of János Vaszary], eds Mariann Gergely and Edit Plesznivy, Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2007, 103–109, English summary: 110, online version:

http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ORSZ_NEMG_kv_35_Vaszary/?pg=104&layout=s. On *Shepherd Boy*, see *Vaszary János (1867–1939) gyűjteményes kiállítása*, 358–359 (Cat. No 334), online version:

http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ORSZ_NEMG_kv_35_Vaszary/?pg=359&layout=s. On *Ladies Playing*, see 353 (Cat. No. 327), online version:

http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ORSZ_NEMG_kv_35_Vaszary/?pg=354&layout=s.

embroideries, while inspired by folk art, diluted that inspiration through the atmosphere of the highly intellectual, modern urban milieu she was part of.¹¹ As a cousin of the Jewish industrialist Lajos Hatvany, a well-known patron of modernist literature and art, Lesznai was closely acquainted with figures such as the young George Lukács or Endre Ady, the symbolist poet – an intellectual circle for whom engaging with modern tendencies in Vienna was self-evident. In the still unified Empire, ideas did not stop at the borders, and a discussion of such connections – as well as of institutional ties, such as the display of a large selection of Wiener Werkstätte objects at the 1913 exhibition of modern Austrian art at the Budapest Művészház (Artists' House)¹² – would have made the discussion of Austro-Hungarian modernism richer and more nuanced, in the manner of the discussion of design reform in Part 1 of the book. With all that said, I would like to stress again that I think the second part of the book provides a very engaging and thorough analysis of the role of textiles in turn-of-the-century Vienna and makes a solid contribution to this field of study as it is. I just find it a pity that the elaborate and extremely useful methodological framework which allowed Houze to examine the Empire as one organic whole in the first half of the volume was not carried on to the second half.

Rebecca Houze's book is about textiles and fashion in Austria-Hungary, but it provides insight into much more: the social, national connections and tensions that made the Empire so strong and vivacious, and yet so extremely fragile. It seems to me that the study of design, which presupposes an anthropological perspective, lends itself much more naturally to the employment of such perspectives than the historiography of the 'fine arts' which is more prone to upholding notions of 'aesthetic value' or to following well-established national narratives while losing sight of the wider political and cultural context. Houze's analysis of textile production problematizes not only traditional hierarchies of artistic techniques, but also the national narratives cherished by the art histories of the nations of former Austria-Hungary – the 'subversive' nature of the 'stitch' certainly shows. Nevertheless, this is only one side of the coin, and Rebecca Houze manages to shed light on both sides. Her discussion of embroidery also reveals the ways in which it contributed to maintaining the status quo both in terms of gender roles and national hierarchies of power. To return to our own example: the ladies who endeavoured to decorate the Hungarian National Museum were, on the one hand, performing a rebellious gesture that confirmed Hungarian national identity in the face of post-revolutionary Austrian absolutism, but their plan can also be seen as a confirmation of the traditional and somewhat outdated county system on which Hungarian politics were based, as well as of the historical borders of the Kingdom of Hungary that comprised several regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. As for questions of gender: were these ladies vindicating the right for women to take part in the

¹¹ See Petra Török, 'Anna Lesznai, Lady of the House for the Eight,' in: *The Eight*, ed. Csilla Markója and István Bardoly, Pécs: Janus Pannonius Museum, 2010, 482–494.

¹² See *A Művészház 1909–1914: Modern kiállítások Budapesten [The Artists' House: Modern Exhibitions in Budapest]*, ed. András Zwickl, Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2009, 165–179, online version: http://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ORSZ_NEMG_kv_45_Muveszhaz/?pg=166&layout=s.

shaping of public space, or were they, to the contrary, reaffirming women's role as homemakers? It is certainly impossible to categorize their project as one or the other. Semper's theoretical textile walls were objects that could both separate and connect; in a similar way, the textiles produced in the Austrian Empire had the power to delineate identities and draw boundaries, but also to join together all the identities they defined. Rebecca Houze's book interrogates this complex subject in a thoughtful and evocative way, making a solid, original and important contribution to the study of the cultural history of Austria-Hungary, as well as to the history of textiles and fashion.

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