

Musealizing Art, Style and Fashion Avant-gardes: Curatorial Practices and Cultural Memory
in Vienna's Museum of Applied Arts

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The “Historical Museum of the City of Vienna” (Wien Museum) /slide 2/, a public museum established by and under the governance of Vienna’s City Council, has become well known for its exhibitions on various aspects of the city’s cultural and social history.¹ The centrality of the museum’s activities for Viennese identity can be seen in the very public debates currently being waged about the future location of the central exhibition space currently located on the Karlsplatz, which was opened in 1959 and is in dire need of renovation and expansion. /slide 3/ While Wolfgang Kos, the current director, favors the centrality of the current location on the Ringstrasse /slide 4/, the ring road directing traffic flows around the inner city and since the late 19th century the location of the city’s monumental buildings of self-representation, the city would like to relocate it to the corporate space of the prestige urban renewal project around the central train station, a mega-redevelopment along the outer ring road of the city which rivals the 19th century’s urban renewal project in both scale and ambition in trying to create a “cultural district” (tentatively titled “Quartier Belvedere” because of the vicinity of the Baroque palace that has become an icon of Austria’s national history) – on property owned by one of Austria’s largest financial institutions, the Erste Bank.² /slides 5-8/

The attention that the museum’s relocation plans have garnered, and its current director’s resistance to be affiliated with public-private partnerships that commodify urban culture

¹ A somewhat revised version of this material can be found in *Wiener Chic: A Locational History of Vienna Fashion* (Bristol: Intellect, forthcoming).

² <http://derstandard.at/1336697980227/Richtungsstreit-um-Zukunft-des-Wien-Museums>, accessed 3 June 2012.

into prestige projects directed mainly at tourists and aligned with strategies of “city branding,” are in keeping with the institution’s reputation for not shying away (occasionally) from controversial topics such as the restitution of art expropriated by the Nazis or the history of squatting in the city – the topic of a current exhibition, which announces its presence loudly and clearly on the facade of the museum /slide 9/ (directed towards one of Vienna’s busiest thoroughfares). Titled *Occupied! The Struggle for Free Spaces* since the 1970s, this exhibition starts with the 100-day-long squat in an abandoned slaughterhouse during the summer of 1976 and the demands for an autonomously governed cultural centre and “examines the political visions and successes of the various generations of squatters and their quest for a different city.” The Arena occupation is credited with “arous[ing] [sic] Vienna from its slumber,”³ creating a new appreciation and understanding of popular and youth culture that draws on Viennese locality (such as local dialect) and a socially subversive, partly even radical social vision.

What has been less known until recently is the fact that the Wien Museum also houses one of the most comprehensive fashion collections in Europe, which forms the basis of regular fashion exhibitions. For example, during the last months (spring/summer 2012), a relatively small-scale (one-room) fashion exhibit /slide 10/ featuring model-turned designer Katarina Noever, who is credited with internationalizing Vienna’s fashion and design scene in the late sixties and seventies, has been vying for attention with the ’68ers that shook Vienna’s then more or less dormant and backwater cultural scene. Much less advertised, “More than just fashion – The Katarina Noever Collection” was extended due to great audience interest. /slide 11/

A fashion collection as a document of Vienna’s avantgarde lifestyle since the 1960s. Katarina Noever was a top model at the time and wore creations from the “Étoile” boutique, which was

³ <http://www.wienmuseum.at/en/exhibitions/detail/ausstellung/besetzkampf-um-freiraeume-seit-den-70ern.html>, accessed 4 June 2012.

a breath of fresh air in stuffy Vienna. In 1971 she and Peter Noever founded the now legendary Section N. This store, designed by Hans Hollein, was “a kind of urban salon” (Laurids Ortner): the Viennese public was introduced to international design in an unconventional way. On offer next to lamps by Achille Castiglioni and furniture by Marcel Breuer were felt slippers from Styria and ethno-fashion from Asia.⁴ /Slide 12/

While there is no official attempt in the museum to connect the stropy world of the often working-class, left-leaning, mildly anarchist culture rebels in the slaughter house to the glossy inner-city-meets-global fashion world of Noever, the parallels between the two exhibitions are striking and point to the role of both the Wien Museum and fashion in the city’s urban fabric: Both exhibitions emphasize Vienna’s cultural “awakening” in a core period of youth upheaval and mobilize histories that matter more to the Viennese than an international audience, and both rely on a comprehensive understanding of culture, its history, and its importance for Vienna’s identity.

Taking a closer look at the role of the museum in its definition of what histories matter for the city can help explain how discourses on fashion have become central to an understanding of the urban fabric in contemporary exhibition practices, and throw some light on the specific understanding of the role of the fashion system in contemporary Vienna.

⁴ “Eine Modesammlung als Dokument der Wiener Lifestyle- Avantgarde seit den 1960er-Jahren. Katarina Noever war damals Top-Model und trug die Kreationen der Boutique „Étoile“, die im muffigen Wien für frischen Wind sorgte. 1971 gründete sie mit Peter Noever die heute legendäre Section N. Dieses von Hans Hollein gestaltete Geschäft war „eine Art urbaner Salon“ (Laurids Ortner): Auf unkonventionelle Weise wurde dem Wiener Publikum internationales Design nahegebracht. Neben Lampen von Achille Castiglioni und Möbeln von Marcel Breuer waren auch steirische Filzpatschen und Ethno-Mode aus Asien im Angebot.” (Folder text)

In many ways, the Wien Museum is an unlikely location for fashion shows and collections. Founded in 1887 as “Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien” (“Historical Museum of the City of Vienna”), it was originally located in City Hall /slide 13/, the neo-gothic prestige building that was meant to emphasize the independence of city government from Habsburg rule by recuperating communal urban self-governance during the Middle Ages. It included, and put on display, the holdings of the city’s armory (the Zeughaus), where not only the weapons that armed the citizens of Vienna were stored but also the spoils of the two failed Ottoman sieges of 1529 and 1683. Displays emphasized the city’s historical role as a bulwark against what was imagined as threats from the East, and characterized Vienna as a feisty place whose spirit of independence was only temporarily subdued during the early modern absolutist period of the Habsburg’s reign, only to be resurrected by the Liberals wresting away the Ringstrasse urban modernisation project from the imperial rulers /slide 14/. While this somewhat triumphalist origin of a large part of the permanent collection would not seem to be an auspicious starting point for engaging with the multifaceted and globally connected strands of the city’s history and collective memory, the lineage of the collection contributed to establishing a tradition that focussed on material culture, rather than elite forms of artistic practice that one finds in the city’s other major museums.

While City Hall provided a clear line of connection between the Vienna city council and the self-presentation of the city, a more prominent location was envisaged at an early stage of the museum’s history, and the Karlsplatz /slide 15/ – an awkwardly dimensioned traffic hub that connects several major traffic arteries while being visually dominated by the Baroque church that recalls imperial power from the Age of Absolutism in sharp contrast with the bourgeois signature buildings of the Künstlerhaus and Musikverein /slide 16/ – became a favoured location. The design of a representative museum building figured prominently in several attempts to re-imagine this space and to align it with the modernisation Vienna was undergoing during the fin-de-siècle. Otto Wagner’s monumental reconceptualisation of the

square /slide 17, 18/ was never realized, and he had to content himself with designing the city railway station opposite the cathedral.

Plans for a dedicated museum space were only realized in 1959, when a competition was held on the occasion of the 80th birthday of ex-mayor Körner. In line with the mildly authoritarian strand characteristic of a city council dominated by social democrats, the jury selected the 4th-ranked design by Oswald Haerdtl, which was understatedly modern and conformed perfectly with the party's avowed ambition to present a visual image of the city that would return it to world city status /slide 19/. In the new building, a permanent exhibition was set up, which follows a predictable chronological sequence of the city's history from Roman fortress to modern city, with a predictable emphasis on the Ottoman sieges and the Ringstrasse/fin-de-siècle eras. Special exhibitions during the first decades of the new exhibition space emphasized urban history, prominent Viennese artists (Otto Wagner) and architectural history, especially of the fin-de-siècle ("Das Stadtbild Wiens im 19. Jahrhundert von der Festung zur Großstadt", 1960), but they already included social history topics that would have been considered daring within the walls of university history departments, which were dominated by political and diplomatic history. ("Exhibition childhood" in 1960). What is also remarkable is the strong focus on urban imaginaries ("Stadtbilder").

For our interests here, an important development of this period was the foundation, in 1946, of a fashion collection by the fashion institute/college of the city, the Modeschule Hetzendorf /slide 20/, based on the holdings of the Vereins für Kultur und Mode, the private collection of Alfred Kunz, the first director of the college, and several donations and acquisitions. This collection, initially not connected to the museum, was handed over to the museum in 1956,⁵

⁵ "Die Modesammlung der Museen der Stadt Wien wurde nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg von Prof. Alfred Kunz, dem ersten Direktor der Modeschule der Stadt Wien, gegründet und 1956 dem Historischen Museum übergeben. Basierend auf den Beständen der ehemaligen Städtischen Sammlungen im Rathaus, des Vereins für Kultur und Mode, der Privatsammlung von Prof. Kunz sowie zahlreichen Schenkungen und Ankäufen entstand

which resulted in the 1960 exhibition “Die Wiener Mode im Wandel der Zeiten” (15. Juni 1960 bis 22. Oktober 1960), followed by two fashion exhibitions in Schloss Hetzendorf (the location of the city's fashion institute) during the early sixties.

The fashion collection clearly formed an important part of the museum's holdings, but the role of fashion in the programming strategy remains somewhat ambivalent and was certainly not central during the following decades. Rather, exhibitions on fashion topics were relegated to the outskirts of the city, especially after the Hermesvilla /slide 21/ was acquired as an additional exhibition space in 1971. The historicist villa, built in 1881 by Franz Joseph for his wife, Empress Elisabeth (herself a fin-de-siècle fashion icon) in the hills at the outskirts of Vienna /slide 22/, not only represents the aristocratic taste culture that gave rise to couture; there could also not be a more pronounced architectural contrast than between a Ringstrasse-era building based on dynastic tastes and built at a time when the Liberals had already taken control of Vienna's more centrally located signature architecture (e.g. the Künstlerhaus and the Musikverein) and the international style of Haerdtl's museum. The role of the Hermesvilla was showcased in the exhibition “200 Jahre Mode in Wien” in 1976. Consequently, fashion exhibitions based on the fashion collection and loans were staged regularly, but never in the central location on the Karlsplatz; rather, they were held in Hetzendorf or Hermesvilla, where eventually a (somewhat short-lived) “permanent” exhibition was set up (“Chic: Damenmode des 20. Jahrhunderts,” 12. April 2005 bis 7. Januar 2009). While fashion was relegated to the (socially/ aristocratically marked) periphery, the central Karlsplatz location rose to international prominence through the blockbuster “Traum und Wirklichkeit” exhibition /slide 23/ of 1985, which arguably led to the re-evaluation and association of Art Nouveau – Jugendstil with Vienna.

eine der umfangreichsten Modesammlungen Europas. ... 1991 gelang es erstmals, einen kleinen permanenten Schauraum in einem Nebenrakt des Schlosses Hetzendorf einzurichten.” {Karner, 2003, #47686@9}

It was not until the new millennium that fashion, under the directorship of Wolfgang Kos (a former radio journalist and prominent 68er) moved to the centre:⁶

- “Wiener Couture: Gertrud Höchsmann 1902–1990” Heiligenkreuzer-Hof, 7. November 2002 bis 25. Januar 2003 (with the Akademie für Angewandte Kunst)”
- “Hutsalon Susi & Milchfrau Rosa: Wiener Verkaufskultur fotografiert von Petra Rainer” Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, Karlsplatz, 1040 Wien, 21. August 2003 bis 28. September 2003”
- “Erstmalige Präsentation der Schenkungen an die Modesammlung des Wien Museum” Wien Museum Karlsplatz, Karlsplatz, 1040 Wien, 7. Juli 2004 bis 12. Dezember 2004

So it was only at the beginning of the new millennium that fashion was wrested away from associations of elitism and class distinction and recognized as a relevant part of the culture of everyday life, contributing to the complexities of the cultural mix that informs Vienna’s urban identity. The specific reasons for this shift in strategy remain to be explored, but it is obvious that this has relocated fashion discourse in Vienna significantly.

Clearly, the Wien Museum has been instrumental in creating an urban identity for Viennese that re-constitutes the imaginary of the city for them. Exhibition programming has affirmed, but on occasion also transcended and queried the city’s alignment with national (or even regional) narratives and identity constructions. What the museum achieves in the context of Vienna’s urban imaginary stands in stark opposition to the campaigns by the tourist board that aim at a Vienna “brand” (which has shifted recently from “Vienna is different/Wien ist anders” to “Vienna – now or never / Wien, jetzt oder nie”)/Slide 24/: While attempts to brand, i.e. condense the imaginary of a city to a visual meme or tag line, are directed at tourists, many of the museum’s exhibits seems to strive to unpack the multiple threads of the city’s texture and do justice to the complexities of its history. Adopting a very liberal notion of culture that is somewhat sensitive to minorities, forgotten and non-hegemonic histories,

⁶ This was also when the “Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien” was rebranded as “Wien-Museum.”

and class issues has thus resulted in presenting a very diverse picture of the city's urban fabric. What is remarkable in this context is that this development has moved the role of fashion – understood as part of a wider discursive realm of urban culture – to the centre and given it visibility by taking it out of the rarefied strata of elite taste culture and distinction and making it part of the city's multilayered collective cultural and historical identity, which is presented as being a diverse, stropic, complex, and often resistant part of Vienna's opening up to consumption and lifestyle, particularly in the wake of 1968. The museum's post-WWII role as an icon of Vienna's "awakening" has provided a narrative framework that manifests itself in many of the exhibitions – including the ones on fashion. While the focus on fashion and design might be partly the result of serendipity – early donations and the close institutional links to the fashion college also operated by the city–, an inclusive concept of culture, understood as always already being inextricably intertwined with the fabric of Viennese everyday life, and the museum's dedication to probing the specific cultural and historical "mix" of Vienna's local specificities, have resulted in a quite unique approach (which is also manifest in the catalogues – high academic quality but not translated and often out of print). This approach has consistently created localized knowledge; the museum is a public memory project that speaks to the Viennese more than tourists. Clearly, it cannot be moved to the Zentralbahnhof without resistance.

At the same time as Katarina Noever's work was being showcased in the Wien Museum, her ex-husband Peter Noever /slide 25/ was making headlines after resigning from his post as director of the MAK in 2011. The circumstances surrounding his resignation are still under investigation; what interests me here is the controversial understanding of style and taste culture that Peter Noever promoted successfully as Austria's longest-serving museum director, an understanding that deliberately challenged the historical role of the institution he led while at the same time partaking of, and mobilizing, its international orientation and tendency to take its cues from, and contribute to, new developments abroad. From the time he was appointed MAK director in 1986, Noever relentlessly presented himself in interviews, publications and events as a visionary who had turned around, almost singlehandedly, a "fusty" institution whose historical legacy was to be seen more as a burden than an asset. Noever's public statements and self-promotion in connection with his role in positioning the MAK have been permeated by the same rhetoric of change already rehearsed in the founding of Section N. Not unlike the corporate fixers who reshaped companies at will in the 1980s, his program for the MAK was idiosyncratic and deliberately controversial in aligning applied arts with avantgarde artistic practices rather than commercially viable design concepts. A look at the history of the museum reveals why this could be presented as a radical move in the landscape of Viennese taste culture and how it ended up reinvigorating the museum's historical connections to the world of fashion.

The urban engineering of Vienna during the Ringstrasse period stemmed from a host of (sometimes diverging) motivations, interests and intentions (cf. chapter 2), and aesthetic considerations were certainly a crucial part of the mix; "geschmückt durch Kunst" (decorated with art) is one of the mottos inscribed on the leaflet of the "Allerhöchst genehmigter Plan der Stadterweiterung" (highest approved plan for city expansion) of 1860 /Slide 26/. Another part was the need for urban renewal in Vienna after the profound social changes that 1848 and its aftermath brought about, which accelerated, albeit unevenly, the speed of industrialization, urbanization, and social reform in the Habsburg lands and raised questions of competitiveness with other nations, most prominently England and France.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a novel form for demonstrating the competitiveness of a nation was institutionalized: the world exhibitions. These large-scale demonstrations of the manufacturing prowess of the leading nations necessitated an aestheticized and popularized representation of industrial and technological progress. The marriage of craftsmanship, industrial production and patterns of consumption manifested itself in several categories of consumer products but was particularly noticeable in "Kunstgewerbe" (decorative or applied arts), which was taken to be indicative of both the economic power and the taste culture of a nation (represented through its capital). Following the enormous success of the first exhibition – the so-called Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations of 1851, a "Museum of Manufactures" was established in London the following year: "Its founding principle was to make works of art available to all, to educate working people and to inspire British designers and manufacturers."⁷ It is here that the founding father of the MAK, Rudolf Eitelberger, found his inspiration. Eitelberger was the first Professor of Art History and Theory ("für Theorie und Geschichte der bildenden Kunst") at the University of Vienna, a university department that was founded in 1852 with his appointment as chair (Egger 271) after he had regained favour with the government following a short dalliance with revolutionary liberalism (Pokorny-Nagel 59). A man with considerable political influence, Eitelberger worried about the deterioration of taste in the Habsburg lands with the onset of industrialization and lobbied the government to create a remedy along the lines of the British model to improve the taste culture and create a meeting place for industry, commerce and aesthetics.

⁷ "The Museum moved to its present site in 1857 and was renamed the South Kensington Museum. Its collections expanded rapidly as it set out to acquire the best examples of metalwork, furniture, textiles and all other forms of decorative art from all periods. It also acquired fine art - paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture - in order to tell a more complete history of art and design" (<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/a/a-brief-history-of-the-museum/>, accessed 12 June 2012). In 1899 the museum moved to its present site and was renamed Victoria and Albert Museum.

“Presumably he put the argument about the profitability of Austrian products in the foreground to make it easier to achieve his own ideas of founding a museum. In competitive ability he saw the conditions for peaceful political and economic competition and attached great hopes to the world exhibitions, which beginning in 1851 began to take place with great rapidity as ‘trade fairs of the decorative arts’ that created a hitherto unknown situation of mutual influence and exchange” (Pokorny–Nagel 61).⁸

The perceived need to “catch up” with the industrializing empires of Western Europe, and the imaginaries they created, by emphasizing Kunstgewerbe as a leading indicator of taste culture led to the *Maiausstellung* (May Exhibition), organized in 1860 by the *Österreichischer Kunstverein* (Austrian Art Association). The event resulted in an intense public debate about the need for a “Kunstgewerbemuseum,” that is, an institution dedicated to the display of applied and decorative arts. Eitelberger’s visit to the South Kensington Museum in connection with the London World exhibition of 1862 further cemented his determination (Pokorny–Nagel 64); he convincingly argued that that museum had successfully contributed to the “progress” Kunstgewerbe had made in Britain, subscribing to the pedagogical understanding of the function of museums that would make a Kunstgewerbemuseum crucial for the success of the Vienna World Exhibition that was to take place in 1873: “Connecting these rational considerations with the patriotic idea of improving Austria’s world exhibition proved successful. On 7 March 1863 Emperor Franz Joseph issued a written order for the

⁸ “Vermutlich steht für ihn das Argument, aus österreichischen Produkten wirtschaftlichen Profit schlagen zu können, im Vordergrund, um seine eigenen Ideen der Museumsgründung leichter durchsetzen zu können. In der Konkurrenzfähigkeit sieht er die Bedingungen für den friedlichen politischen und wirtschaftlichen Wettstreit und knüpft große Hoffnungen an die sich ab 1851 an verschiedenen Orten in rascher Folge wiederholenden Weltausstellungen als ‘Jahrmärkte des Kunstgewerbes’, die eine bis dahin unbekannte Situation gegenseitiger Beeinflussung und Austauschbarkeit schaffen.”

foundation of such an institution and at first assigned the new ‘taste-building’ museum the Ballhaus as a location” (Boeckl 19).⁹

Eitelberger was appointed director when the k.k. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie (the Imperial Austrian Museum for Art and Industry) opened in 1864. Together with his fellow academic and second-in-command Jacob von Falke (Pokorny-Nagel 70), he implemented an academic program that was built on historicist academic tenets and thus fit well into the Ringstrasse concept. Taste (“guter Geschmack”) was to be acquired by studying the best the past had to offer, and the Museum’s collections reflected this. Organized according to materials (a system derived from the South Kensington model), the collections were meant to be inspirations and educational tools for designers who started out by copying them faithfully. This method was also the guiding principle for the Kunstgewerbeschule/ School of Applied Arts (Franz 90), which has complemented the museum since 1867 and which shared its administration until 1900, and for the annual exhibitions of industrial products which have been held since 1874. Addressing a public with its taste-building mission,¹⁰ this institution dedicated to art and industry remained firmly rooted in a historicist understanding of the model character of the past, out of which a “national” style was to develop.

⁹ “Die Verbindung dieser sachlichen Überlegungen mit dem patriotischen Gedanken, Österreichs Weltausstellung zu stärken, war erfolgreich: Am 7. März 1863 ordnete Kaiser Franz Joseph per Handbillet die Gründung einer solchen Institution an und wies dem neuen Geschmacksbildungsmuseum zunächst das Ballhaus als Standort zu.”

¹⁰ “Der Glaube, Kunst und Kunstgewerbe im speziellen durch Lehre und Wissenschaft qualitativ verbessern zu können, war in Wien durch Rudolf von Eitelberger zur Doktrin erklärt worden” (Pokorny-Nagel 81). *Geschmacksbildung* meant an appreciation of historical models. The collections consequently strove to include exemplary objects from each era, with copies and photographs complementing originals and copying faithfully from those models was the core way of instruction in the attached Kunstgewerbeschule, originally housed in the museum’s attic (Scholda 220).

The orientation towards past models, which proved to have enormous longevity for Vienna's imaginary, as well as the institution's international inspiration and aspirations are reflected in the style of the new building in which the museum was to be housed /Slide 27/. Heinrich von Ferstel, the young architect of the painstakingly historicist neo-Gothic Votivkirche (the first major building commissioned for the Ringstrasse redevelopment) and the exhibition space on the Ballhausplatz, who had established his reputation as a designer for Kunstgewerbe exhibits, won the commission for the new museum building in 1867. Ferstel's building, which opened on 4 November 1871, continued the historicist legacy by evoking Renaissance façades and architectural structures of Renaissance palaces in ways that were functional for a museum. His basic tenet, already manifest in the Votivkirche, was "exactitude in the reproduction of historical motifs", but here he shifted from the Gothic to a firm belief in the "exemplary nature of the Renaissance". Agreeing with Eitelberger on the timelessness of an aesthetics derived from the Mediterranean, he felt its character apposite for what could become a "national" taste culture in the Empire's capital.

The tight integration of the School of Applied Arts and the Museum and its firm grounding in historicist thinking, legitimated by the prevailing academic tenets of the second half of the nineteenth century, prevented the cross-fertilization with industry envisaged by its founders. A style culture oriented towards the past was not necessarily conducive to reflecting, on the level of style and taste, the modernizing thrust of the last decades of the nineteenth century (culminating in the Secession movement of 1897) and was at best ambivalent towards the commercialization of design culture that was part of its mission.

It was only under the influence of Secession artists that these values came under increasing scrutiny. The institution's inability to address contemporary demands by turning to the past was raised by a new generation of artists, most prominently by Otto Wagner (Pokorny-Nagel 88). This led, in 1900, to an administrative separation of the School of Applied Arts and the Museum, a move that opened the School of Applied Arts to modern influences by recruiting teachers from the Secession movement such as Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser, and Alfred

Roller, which set the institution on a trajectory of innovation that has characterized its reputation and teaching style ever since. The School became an institution of higher education in 1941, was given university status in 1970, and renamed the “University of Applied Arts” in 1998.

Fashion appeared on the scene courtesy of the Wiener Werkstätte (Viennese Workshops), a “Produktivgenossenschaft” (co-operative) of visual artists led by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser that evolved from the Secession’s interest in reforming the applied arts along the lines of several foreign models, including Ruskin and Morris’s arts and crafts movement, “Ashbee’s British Guild of Handicrafts, which Hoffmann visited in 1902[;] the United Workshops for Arts and Crafts, founded in 1897, to which Peter Behrens and Hermann Obrist belonged, and the Dresden Crafts Workshop, founded in 1898” (Cunningham 194). The group adhered to the principle of lifestyle as Gesamtkunstwerk, which bears striking similarities to Bradley Quinn’s fashion space – the idea that all design aspects of a space should harmonize. In 1905 the group established a textile workshop:

“Hoffmann and Moser had already worked successfully with the textile firm of Backhausen & Söhne for carpets and upholstery, but set up the in-house operation to focus on more lavish hand-printed and painted silk designs. With such luxury cloth, manufactured in literally thousands of patterns constantly replenished by the Werkstätte’s leading artists – Hoffmann, Dzeschka, et al – Vienna first made its mark on the international fashion scene.” (Fahr-Becker 101)¹¹

Next to be founded was a fashion workshop, by Eduard Josef Wimmer-Wisgrill, who had been a private student of Moser’s and studied with Hoffmann and Roller at the Kunstgewerbeschule from 1901 to 1907. Upon completion of his studies he founded the fashion workshop and led it until 1922. While Hoffmann taught a master class in architecture

¹¹ Backhausen converted the basement of its shop in Vienna’s first district (at Schwarzspanierstraße 10) into a textile museum so that it could display its comprehensive archive of 3500 original sketches of textile designs, which it claims is the largest in the world (<http://www.backhausen.com/index.php?m=museum&s=geschichte>, accessed 29 November 2012).

whose students produced a fashion magazine in 1914 (Buxbaum 1986, 265), it is Wimmer-Wisgrill who is considered “the Viennese answer to Paul Poiret, and a review of his designs as well as those of his colleagues shows a constant dialogue with Paris fashion and Poiret’s designs in particular” (Fahr-Becker 101).

With the coming of WWI, that dialogue became more of a call to arms, namely, “los von Paris,” away from Paris. For the fashion industry, this meant increasing emancipation. The fashions of the *Wiener Werkstätte* became trendsetting especially in Switzerland, where fashion shows in Bern and Zurich helped to seal their success. By 1916 they had their own production space and a sales branch in the Palais Esterházy at Kärntnerstrasse 41 (Buxbaum 1986, 219). Further shops followed both in Vienna and abroad (Karlsbad in 1909, Marienbad and Zürich in 1916/17, New York in 1922, and Berlin in 1929), but the post-war years were not kind to the *Werkstätte*. A group that catered to the rarefied tastes of the 1% of their day was not destined to do well in the lean, inflation-ravaged, post-war years: “standards of quality declined, and an unmistakable element of kitsch marked too many of its productions” (Varnedoe 103).

In 1922 Wimmer-Wisgrill left for the US, where he worked as a fashion and theatre illustrator in New York and taught fashion at the Art Institute of Chicago. Upon his return in 1925, he assumed leadership of a “Meisterklasse in Mode” at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, which has enjoyed increasing renown with each of its directors. In contrast to the fashion school at Hetzendorf, which concentrates more on projects and practical matters, the *Modeklasse* is connected to other disciplines at the *Kunstgewerbemuseum* and enjoys a productive exchange with graphic design and the arts (Buxbaum 2012). After Wimmer-Wisgrill’s thirty-year tenure, leading designers Gertrud Höchsmann (1959–1972) and Fred Adlmüller (1973–1979) assumed the position, while the likes of Karl Lagerfeld, Helmut Lang, Veronique Branquinho, Jean Charles de Castelbajac, Viktor&Rolf, Raf Simons, and Vivienne Westwood have all taught there. Its alumnae have brought the institution a measure of renown as well,

from Gustav Klimt and Emilie Flöge [Figure 2.16] to Anna Aichinger, and it has also developed a small fashion collection, which is currently supervised by Elizabeth Frottier.

While the school, and later university, embraced the innovations the Vienna modern ushered in, the Museum remained dedicated to its increasingly antiquarian mission, with historicism baked into its DNA and exhibition style. Indicative of its character is the fact that what is now considered the pinnacle of Vienna's modern turn in Kunstgewerbe, the Wiener Werkstätte, only became a part of the Museum's collection in 1955, more than twenty years after the movement's demise (Noever 1995, 12). When Peter Noever became its director in 1986, the appointment was made in the midst of a public debate about the role of state-financed museums, a global turn toward blockbuster exhibitions, and a revival of interest in fin-de-siècle Vienna that had manifested itself in the blockbuster 1985 *Traum und Wirklichkeit* (Dream and Reality) exhibition at the Künstlerhaus.

The rather neglected, cozily antiquarian MAK did not escape attention. It was seen as directionless, dilapidated and in need of renewal, and Noever, a well-known designer who associated with the likes of Arthur C. Clarke and Marshall McLuhan, was seen as just the man for the job. "Already at the beginning of this [the 20th] century it was not quite free of anachronisms; now, a century later, it had blatantly outlived itself. The Museum of Applied Arts' lack of profile was basically nothing other than the visible result of the institution's spiritual climate, which could be characterized as a kind of vacuum in terms of content and ideology," writes one of Noever's admirers in one of the flood of publications that accompanied Noever's tenure at the MAK and hammered home his concept of giving museal *Geschmacksbildung* a new direction (Waechter-Böhm 77).¹² That new direction was to bring it "back to the present" (Waechter-Böhm 88) and reorient it programmatically towards

¹² "Es dürfte schon zu Beginn dieses Jahrhunderts nicht ganz frei von Anachronismen gewesen sein, jetzt, ein gutes Jahrhundert später, hatte es sich längst eklatant überlebt. Im Grunde war der Mangel an Profil des Museums für angewandte Kunst nichts anderes als die sichtbare Folgeerscheinung des geistigen Klimas im Haus, das sich auch als eine Art inhaltliches und ideologisches Vakuum charakterisieren ließe."

contemporary art (Noever 1995, 13). Unlike the V&A, which opened itself up to commercial culture under similar pressures (which ultimately led to a proud tradition of incorporating fashion exhibits and collections), the MAK insisted on the importance of social relevance over popularity and over visitor numbers as its principal criterion of quality and success, which implied for Noever and his circle the necessity of radically divorcing the museum from its historical orientation and opening it up to critical impulses from abroad. In an interview, Noever states this very succinctly:

“The institution was practically suffocating on its own past. That’s why it was my first priority to stop this losing oneself in history, this unreflected, undistanced fixation on a tradition. It would be totally absurd to try today to carry out the original foundational purpose ‘according to the letter,’ so to speak [...] In such an institution in particular, it should be about daring into new territory” (Waechter-Böhm 79).¹³

While “Traum und Wirklichkeit” managed to musealize a Vienna modern that had questioned the MAK’s historicist foundation during the fin-de-siècle, the institution itself turned away from its historical legacy and found a new mission in critical contemporary art and architecture as the turn of the millennium approached. At the time of its re-orientation, Vienna lacked a museum dedicated to the display of such art.¹⁴ Noever saw contemporary art as inspiring taste and denied mass production any relevance for the mission of the museum: “In the age of mass production, objects of applied art are primarily interesting as cultural and historical objects, but can hardly be taken as models for contemporary aesthetic production

¹³ “Das Haus ist an seiner eigenen Vergangenheit fast erstickt. Daher ging es mir zunächst einmal darum, dieses Sich-Verlieren in der Geschichte, diese unreflektierte, distanzlose Fixierung auf eine Tradition zu unterbinden. Es wäre doch völlig absurd, wollte man heute versuchen, den ursprünglichen Gründungsauftrag sozusagen ‘buchstabengetreu’ weiterzuführen [...] Gerade in einem solchen Haus kommt es darauf an, sich auf Neuland hinauszuwagen.”

¹⁴ In the meantime several institutions have developed to fill this void, including the KunstHausWien, which was designed by Friedensreich Hundertwasser and opened in 1991, the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien in the Museumsquartier, which was gifted with a major collection of contemporary art in 1981 and opened in its new location in 2001, and the 21er Haus, which used to be the 20er Haus but reopened in 2011 with a new mandate to display contemporary Austrian art.

[...] Neither applied arts nor design are in themselves adequate role models or stimuli for contemporary debate. Art is a much more powerful ignition force” (Noever 1995, 13). Noever’s rhetoric played well in an atmosphere in which the common sense was that there was too much attention to history and that Vienna was always somewhat “behind” in questions of contemporary artistic and taste culture. He picked the right enemies to position the museum as something Vienna sorely lacked, while also not disguising his contempt for the popular and the culture industries:

“At the same time the culture industry makes use of art and forces artists into the role of entertainer-cheerleaders of an expanding culture-society. The contempt of art that the makers of a growth-oriented leisure-time and tourist society feel is thereby made clear. Culture is responsible for everything, also in part for art [...] The discussion of such phenomena of a development has established itself in this country, as in many others, with considerable time delay” (Noever 1988, 121).¹⁵

“This institution, the Austrian Museum for Applied Art, certainly has the chance, after all it has achieved, to become a place of confrontation, a place of resistance, an arena for conflicts, but also to remain a place of the mysterious, a place of feelings and dreams” (Noever 1988, 125).¹⁶

It seems ironic that Noever’s relentlessly avant-garde ideology and rhetoric, which quickly manifested itself in architectural changes to the museum, was somewhat anachronistic for the mid-1980s, precisely the time when Vienna’s globalizing taste culture was opening up to the global popular, to street style and international designer brand names. However, this

¹⁵ “Gleichzeitig bedient sich der Kulturbetrieb der Kunst und drängt die Künstler in die Rolle von Animatoren einer expandierenden Kulturgesellschaft. Die Verachtung der Kunst durch die Macher einer wachstumsorientierten Freizeit- und Tourismusgesellschaft wird damit deutlich. Kultur ist für alles zuständig, am Rande auch für die Kunst [...] Die Diskussion über solche Phänomene einer Entwicklung hat in diesem Land, wie vieles andere, mit erheblicher Zeitverzögerung eingesetzt.”

¹⁶ “Dieses Haus, das Österreichische Museum für angewandte Kunst, hat nach dem bisher Erreichten durchaus eine Chance, ein Ort der Auseinandersetzung, ein Ort des Widerstandes, eine Austragungsstätte für Konflikte zu werden, aber auch ein Ort des Geheimnisvollen, ein Ort der Gefühle und Träume [...] zu bleiben.”

program did not prevent Noever from adopting strategies of commodification that had proven successful elsewhere, pursuing sponsoring initiatives, wooing contemporary artists (and social circles close to contemporary artists, cf. Noever 1988, 123) to his institution, and organizing society events that helped sponsor his plans. Assisted by the “first ‘Museums Billion,’ one billion Schillings earmarked for the restoration of Austria’s national museums” (Noever 1995, 15), the renovations he spearheaded included not only important and welcome extensions of exhibition spaces but also a swank restaurant that soon became a go-to place for stylish crowds that demonstrated their elite tastes by proximity to contemporary art – and not by its appreciation of mass-produced design icons, as in London’s Design Museum, which was founded in 1989 by Terence Conran and whose Blueprint Cafe was designed to attract a similar crowd.

Another example of the international orientation of the museum that prioritizes contemporary art over Vienna’s historicist tradition is the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles, whose founding in 1995 Noever spearheaded (cf. Noever 2002). Propagating “the spirit of the life’s work of Rudolph M. Schindler (1887–1953), the Vienna architect and student of Otto Wagner who emigrated to the USA in 1914” (Noever 2002, 204), the Center consists of three separate modernist dwellings Schindler designed in the interwar period: the Pearl M. Mackey Apartments, the Fitzpatrick-Leland House, and the Schindler House /slide 28/. It continues the spirit of the MAK’s re-orientation and “aims for a radical contemporary orientation. Its program concentrates on new spatial and architectural trends and developments emanating from the interface of art and architecture” (ibid). The spread attempted here is interesting. Clearly Vienna modernism, of which Otto Wagner was a figurehead and advocate, was not (quite) an apposite model for what the MAK was trying to accomplish because it had already been musealized and domesticated as the dream world of fin-de-siècle coffee-house culture and was no longer the avant-garde, utopian type of project Noever encouraged; however, he still seems to have felt the need to establish a connection to the Vienna modern.

Since being acquired by the Austrian government, the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles has sponsored artists in residence, public outreach activities, as well as the museum, which occupies the house the architect designed for himself and runs a residency program out of the apartments.¹⁷ It almost seems as if the historical lineage that connects the artistic, social and cultural visions of Vienna's fin-de-siècle modernism to contemporary art – its social criticism, international outlook, and spirit of renewal and innovation – needed to be transplanted to America's west coast in order to be made meaningful for Noever's concept.

In taking up the directorial reins that Peter Noever was forced to relinquish, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein /slide 29/, formerly the Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York¹⁸ and Managing Director at Departure, the creative agency of the City of Vienna responsible for providing the fashion scene with important funding, now has the mandate of steering the institution in a new direction. However, as of late 2012, the public statements of the former career diplomat reveal little of substance about the new direction – the most noticeable change is in the rhetoric. At his first program presentation, Thun-Hohenstein displayed none of Noever's radical and confrontational overtones when he explained that “Applied art needs to be filled with new life. Utilizing its potential as a motor of positive change in our society – socially, ecologically and culturally – is the main mission of an active museum of applied arts.”¹⁹ It is a program that is hard to object to, a diplomatic marriage of Noever's program of social change, the tradition of the museum and a timely, if somewhat generic bow to environmental sustainability:

“Although I greatly respect this tradition, my mission is clearly to steer the museum into the 21st century. We have about four sections: applied art – though I am not very clear what it is – design, architecture, contemporary art, and intercreativity, that is

¹⁷ Details are available on the Center's website: www.makcenter.org, accessed 18 December 2012.

¹⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/30/arts/music/30thun.html>, accessed 18 December 2012.

¹⁹ <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/new-director-christoph-thun-hohenstein-to-re-position-mak-vienna/>, accessed 18 December 2012.

interdisciplinary ideas and projects involving those fields. To me it is important that the MAK does not become solely a design museum or a museum for the decorative arts. All these things belong together. [...] But the focus in general will be on positive change, or, to be more precise, on the contributions architecture (as well as design, applied art, and contemporary art) can make to positive ecological, social, and cultural change.”²⁰

Compromise seems to be the main message, communicated diplomatically: not a rupture with Noever’s legacy, but mobilizing the institution’s roots and rediscovering the historicist legacy of its permanent collection. “Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Director of the MAK since September, has achieved an artistic feat: he acknowledges the way his predecessor positioned the museum – and yet does everything differently” is how the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard* summarizes Thun-Hohenstein’s diplomatic tap dance.²¹

In the winter of 2012–13, one of the exhibitions featured at the MAK was “Wien 1900: Wiener Kunstgewerbe 1890–1938” (Vienna 1900: Viennese Decorative/ Applied Arts 1890–1938), and Thun-Hohenstein’s opening remarks capture the conciliatory, tame but still clearly elite spirit of the program:

“What moved us to again take an interest in Vienna 1900? Simply the circumstance that we have a world-class collection and Vienna around 1900 is a central part of this collection. It is my conviction that every art museum should be a contemporary museum that engages with the past from the perspective of the present and does not

²⁰ <http://archpaper.com/news/articles.asp?id=5635>, accessed 18 December 2012.

²¹ “Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, seit September Direktor des Mak, ist ein Kunststück gelungen: Er bekennt sich zur Positionierung des Museums unter seinem Vorgänger - und macht doch alles anders.” <http://derstandard.at/1319183690114/Die-Plaene-des-neuen-Direktors-Christoph-Thun-Hohenstein>, accessed 18 December 2012.

just have an art-historical point of view but rather also has a cultural-historical one and also tries to go beyond it to see was it relevant for today”²² [Figure 2.18].

While viewers are treated to this firm commitment to both the historical legacy and contemporary critique, as well as to some truisms about art and the museum that are so vague that neither the firmly antiquarian Eitelsberger nor radically avant-garde Noever could possibly object, the camera of the vimeo clip from which this quote is taken presents fin-de-siècle furniture and period paintings. The only slightly disruptive moment comes when the camera pans from Claudia Schmied, the Austrian Education Minister (from the Social Democratic Party), in whose portfolio the MAK is situated and who formally opened the exhibition, to a political poster exhorting early twentieth-century voters to “renovate” and vote for the social democrats of their time (“Sanierung – wählt sozialdemokratisch” [00:32]).

The presence of the MAK in social media (with two dedicated vimeo channels) and its continuing organization of major society events for (aspiring) celebrities in Vienna also shows that the traditions Noever created to attract a particular crowd with the habitus of a socially aware taste elite are being continued.²³ Clearly, the MAK is not going to transform itself into a design museum that embraces mass production in the way the institution on the Thames did twenty years ago; Vienna is not seen as a fulcrum of design in Thun-Hohenstein’s imaginary. “Should Vienna become a place of design like Milan? No!” he declared firmly at the opening of the “Design 4 You” exhibition held from 6 June – 7 October 2012, curated by Hartmut Esslinger and Thomas Geisler, and focusing on “over 80 examples of designers’

²² “Was hat uns bewogen, hier uns um Wien 1900 wieder zu kümmern? Einfach der Umstand, dass wir eine Weltklassesammlung haben und Wien um 1900 ein zentraler Bereich dieser Sammlung ist und nach meiner Überzeugung jedes Kunstmuseum ein zeitgenössisches Museum sein muss, das sich immer wieder aus der Gegenwart heraus mit der Vergangenheit beschäftigt und nicht nur den kunsthistorischen Blick tätigt, sondern auch den kulturhistorischen und darüber hinaus auch herauszuarbeiten versucht, was davon auch heute noch relevant ist.” <https://vimeo.com/54454923>.

²³ vimeo.com/36409253 [3:20].

output to examine new tendencies and strategic approaches of the twenty-first century that point out forward-looking social, ecological and cultural innovations”.²⁴ The catalogue is not reticent about its intended audience:

“It is aimed neither exclusively at the small group of wealthy design customers, nor generally at the other 90 per cent to whom design is not and partly cannot be of conscious concern. Rather, it is conceived to address the steadily growing number of people who, in their decisions as consumers and otherwise, are in the happy situation of being able to choose between different options. Excellent design must be so convincing that it motivates as many people as possible to make the right choice. Here, ‘right’ means: in the interest of society’s positive further development, especially with regard to environmental issues” (Thun Hohenstein et al 3).

Something of a vision emerges here: design as an ecologically aware “fun” culture for those who can afford it (not the “other” 90 per cent!), an educational program of the right form of consumerism, and seduction as its strategy:

“Politically correct persuasion is important. But broad swaths of the populace will only begin to assume responsibility based on literacy and agency when the ‘fun factor’ is properly included. Design represents the ideal artistic tool with which to communicate the fun to be had and the joy to be found in assuming responsibility for sustainable change. During my tenure at departure, the slogan ‘irresistibly responsible’ was coined for this idea – and since then, probably no better expression has been found with which to sum up what this is all about” (Thun Hohenstein et al 5).

Much could be said about the glib marriage of a neoliberal rhetoric of consumer choice, the palpable condescension to the less educated, a vision of social engineering straight out of the modernists’ playbook, and its articulation to issues of environmental protection and sustainability that drives so much of current “creative” design and technology. However, for the role of the museum in Vienna’s taste culture, suffice it here to point out that the

²⁴ “Soll Wien Mailand werden als Designstadt? Nein!” (<https://vimeo.com/44249750>;
http://www.mak.at/en/more_mak/videochannel/made_4_you_design_for_change_5)

vernacular does not seem to be on the taste horizon of a descendant of the Habsburg empire's high nobility, whose education and career trajectory is firmly tied to Austria's social elites, who also consider themselves taste elites.²⁵ Under Thun-Hohenstein, the MAK seems set to continue its tradition and mission of *Geschmacksbildung* with an elitist understanding of what constitutes taste and how to communicate it.²⁶

²⁵ It might seem contradictory that this elitism is being sponsored by a minister from the Social Democratic Party. However, in the Austrian context, there is a strong strand of *Bildungsbürgertum* pervading the party, with Bruno Kreisky being the outstanding example. This also defines a strong dividing line between the Social Democratic movement at the federal level, and the social democrats who operate at the city level.

²⁶ The Works Cited and illustrations are available in the forthcoming *Wiener Chic: A Locational History of Vienna* (Bristol: Intellect Books).