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Chapter XX

Designs on Modernity: Gertrud Loew's Vienna Apartment and Situated Agency

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On 24 June 2015, Gustav Klimt's 1902 portrait of *Gertrud Loew* sold at Sotheby's for £24.8 million (Sotheby's 2015). The sale concluded a protracted restitution case between Loew's heirs and the private Klimt Foundation in Vienna. The painting was originally commissioned by Gertrud's father Dr Anton Loew (1847-1907), a prominent physician of Jewish descent and owner of Vienna's premier therapeutic space, the Sanatorium Loew.¹ Klimt painted the nineteen-year old Gertrud as a beautiful young woman of gentle, almost dreamy, disposition and dressed in fashionable reform dress.² Klimt's portrait generated much critical acclaim when it was first exhibited at the 18th Secession Exhibition in 1903. The leading progressive critic Ludwig Hevesi, for example, praised the work for its 'most diaphanous lyricism of which the painter's palette is capable' (Natter 2012: 583).

The following essay uses Klimt's portrait as a point of entry into the fascinating life of Gertrud Loew. The Loews were early supporters of Viennese modernism and their daughter was well versed in using art and design to foster her social aspirations as a doyenne of Vienna's elite culture. Upon her marriage to Johann Eisler von Terramare in 1903, Gertrud Loew commissioned Koloman Moser to refurbish their marital home. This essay explores this specific interior to shed light on how women and more specifically, Jewish women of the grand bourgeoisie, engaged with design culture to shape their *Lebenswelt* or everyday world. The space and its stakeholders – designer, patron, users – demand a more careful examination that takes into account the role of material objects in the historical experience of a particular class of modern women who activated design to become taste-makers of their day. Historians need to shift their gendered focus on (male) designers to (female) consumers, and to the objects themselves. As part of this recalibration, this essay opens with a brief consideration of

the fascinating analytical coupling between design and agency that engendered this collection of essays. After a brief introduction of Gertrud Loew as a prominent Jewish supporter of modern art and patron of the Wiener Werkstätte (1903-1932), the essay offers a comprehensive analysis of the Gertrud Loew's apartment as a complex space that fostered Loew's social ambitions but ultimately resisted its complete appropriation as a gambit for cultural superiority.

This volume's theme of *Design and Agency* offers a judicious critical framework through which to re-examine this modern interior. Its editors propose agency as a multi-directional and polyvalent force, which inadvertently complicates the distinction between actors and agent. Ivan Karp suggests that actors are confined by rules that tend to reinforce structure, while agents operate across a more nebulous territory (Karp 1986). Agents therefore have more scope to affect their environment. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines agency as 'a thing or person that acts to produce a particular result'. From this follows that 'agency is a socio-culturally mediated capacity to act' (Hoskins 2013: 74). Scholars interested in material culture explore the role of objects in this process. The social world's *Dinglichkeit* (Heidegger 1927), or material dimension, currently drives many debates in the social sciences (Geritsen and Riello 2015, Daston 2004, and Wagner and Rübel 2002). Objects are made, circulated and consumed because they act upon the world. From this follows that culture is embedded in the physical environment (Grassby 2005). This premise allows historians to think about the relationship between agency and design (as a material practice) in new ways: historical agents act *with* and *through* objects. In this context, Bruno Latour's 'Actor Network Theory' levels any distinction between human and non-human actors. Latour stresses that objects bring-into-being the very networks within which social interactions take place (Latour 2005).

But 'Actor Network Theory' does not sufficiently account for subjectivity and human motivation. Yet, historians of material culture argue that objects are invaluable as 'a

repository of knowledge about how people organised their circumstances and understood themselves' (Applegate and Potter 2018: 76). If objects are 'repositories of knowledge' then historians must pay attention to their formal properties as principal conduits of meaning. But form in-and-of-itself only becomes meaningful when placed within socio-political context. Christopher Tilly makes this point: 'meaning is created out of situated, contextualised social action which is in a continuous dialectical relationship with generative rule-based structures forming both a medium for and an outcome of action' (2001: 260). This offers new insights into the ways in which progressive women like Gertrud Loew deployed modern design culture to secure her place in Vienna's strictly patrolled second society. But 'making history through objects' (Ulrich, et al., 2015) is further complicated by the fact that their materiality complicates, and indeed destabilises, historical subjectivity-formation as a one-way street from inanimate object to human actor. It might be more productive to describe this dynamic as a 'dance of agency' between humans and artefacts (Pickering 2010). The idea of a dynamic interplay between materiality and subjectivity presupposes that historical agency is a situated process.

The idea of 'situated agency' offers a response to poststructuralism's assertion that subjectivity is entirely constructed by cultural, economic, and socio-political forces. Scholars who propose subjects as 'situated agents' acknowledge the constitutive relationship between conduct and context, but they leave room for a self-conscious response or creative intervention. Michel de Certeau comes to mind here. He famously postulated jaywalking as a tactical subversion of urban control and regulation (1980: 98). Taking her cue from de Certeau, Naomi Choi defines situated agency in relation to political governance as follows:

Individuals are never merely the passive supports of prescribed roles or social processes; nor can human actions be explained solely in causal, functional, or mechanical terms. Social actors must be understood, at least in part, as intentional subjects acting in response to an understood situation and whose actions must also be seen in terms of a symbolic or meaningful character for the agents themselves (2007: 873).

Choi traces the relationship between human behaviour and social practice, but she neglects to account for the material world that locates these negotiations and drives them. Here, design historians have an important contribution to make because they are interested in the physical parameters of the notoriously elusive mechanisms of (historical) subjectivity-formation.

Arjun Appadurai made a convincing case that objects (in his case, commodity culture) create social relationships and constitute identity (1988).

Gertrud 'Gerta' Loew (1883-1964) and Vienna's Cultural Elite

Klimt painted Gertrud Loew's portrait when she was about to marry and leave her family home. For most young women of her day, this entailed a seamless transition from her father's guardianship to that of her husband. Feminist historians have long argued that nineteenth-century industrialisation, and its ideological separation of home from work, spawned a rhetoric of separate spheres that increasingly confined women to the domestic realm (Wallach Scott 1988).³ Gertrud Loew does not easily fit into this paradigm. She grew up in an acculturated Jewish household that embraced liberal values and encouraged their daughter's intellectual abilities. Even Klimt could not obfuscate Gertrud Loew's confidence and his hitherto successful formula of painting fashionable 'femme fragiles' was met with a degree of resistance (Wieber 2009). Gertrud Loew holds the viewer's gaze and refuses to be completely objectified. After all, she was a well-educated young woman with cultural capital of her own; she was engaged to one of Vienna's most eligible bachelors; and she anticipated the opportunity to run her own household. The latter included hosting members of central Europe's cultural and political elite on a regular basis and acting as a consummate salonnière.

Gertrud 'Gerta' Franziska Sophie Loew was born on 16 November 1883 as the only daughter of Sophie Ungerer and Anton Loew. Her parents were assimilated Jews and Gertrud

was baptised Roman-Catholic at birth. Anton Loew owned Lower Austria's premier therapeutic clinic in Vienna's ninth district (Mariannengasse 20).⁴ The Sanatorium Loew treated members from Vienna's socio-cultural elites such as Gustav Klimt, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Gustav Mahler who died there in 1911. Historians Alan Janik and Hans Veigl described such clinics as 'a place where the well-to-do frequently went to spend their waning days. Private hospitals were part of the elegant lifestyle of the patrician class at the time. They too were a part of a life of fashionable luxury' (1998: 153). The Loews comfortably moved among these fashionable elites. Anton Loew was an avid supporter and collector of modern art, who bequeathed his collection to Gertrud in 1907.⁵ Gertrud Loew married the wealthy entrepreneur Johann Arthur 'Hans' Eisler von Terramare (1878-1938) in 1903. The Eisler von Terramare family owned the Habsburg Empire's first commercial canning factory, the *k.u.k. Militär-Konserven-Fabrik Eisler & Co* (1873) and made their fortune from an exclusive contract with the Habsburg Empire's military (Sandgruber 2013: 333). Gertrud Loew brought her family's cultural prominence into the marriage and Eisler von Terramare injected considerable disposable income – on paper, they were a perfect match.

The couple rented an apartment in the historicist *Ölzelt Palais* on Schottenring (Schottengasse 10), which was on Vienna's fashionable Ring Street. Together, they embarked on a mission of firmly securing their position in Vienna's so-called second society. This social stratum was somewhat nebulous in composition. One contemporary observer described its members as 'wealthy and very fashionable, and said to be amusing [...]. It consists of bankers, artists, merchants, architects, engineers, actors, employés [sic], and officers, with their families' (Paget 1905: 796).⁶ Financial and marital alliances amongst members were common and many shared Jewish roots. Unfortunately, the couple divorced shortly after the death of their two-year old daughter in 1905 (Lilie 2003: 358). Gertrud married the Hungarian

industrialist Elemér Baruch von Felsövanyi (1882-1923) later that year and became the CEO and main shareholder of the Sanatorium Loew when her father died in 1907.⁷ She lost everything after Austria's annexation into Nazi Germany in 1938 (*Anschluss*); her sanatorium was closed that year and she was forced to flee Vienna in 1939, leaving behind her significant art and design collections.⁸ Gertrud Felsövanyi never returned to her native city and died in California in 1964.

Gertrud Loew's marriage to Hans Eisler von Terramare was short lived but it left a material and visual trace of enormous importance to design history because she commissioned Koloman Moser (1868-1918) to refurbish her future marital home. Moser was one of Vienna's most progressive designers of the day and co-founder of the Wiener Werkstätte (1903-1932). Gertrud Loew enlisted Moser as her principal interior decorator and he designed all fittings and furnishings.⁹ This was Moser's first major project and he commenced work in 1902, which was before the formal inception of the Wiener Werkstätte on 12 May 1903.¹⁰ He completed the Eisler von Terramare apartment in September 1903 and employed craftsmen of the Wiener Werkstätte to produce many of his designs for lamps, chandeliers, metal work, silver objects, frames, vases etc. These contents are now dispersed across private and public collections, or lost. But design historians have access to an invaluable archival resource in the shape of a richly illustrated article published in 1904 by the renowned Viennese critic Berta Zuckerkandl (1864-1945). Her essay in the prominent German applied arts journal *Dekorative Kunst* introduced readers to Koloman Moser and included thirty-four black and white photographs of his recently completed Eisler von Terramare apartment. (Zuckerkandl 1904: 329-57).

Zuckerkandl was a staunch supporter of the Vienna Secession and of the Wiener Werkstätte. She was the daughter of the Jewish liberal newspaper magnate Moritz Szeps (1835-1902) and married to the Hungarian anatomist Emil Zuckerkandl (whose brother

Viktor owned the famous Sanatorium Purkersdorf, the Wiener Werkstätte's first major commission). Berta Zuckerkandl and Gertrud Loew moved in the same social circles and both shaped Viennese modernism: Zuckerkandl as a prolific journalist and prescient art critic, Loew as a progressive patron and salonnière. Zuckerkandl's article on Moser embedded the Eisler von Terramare's Vienna apartment into a larger argument on the importance of a modern style. The accompanying photographs played a key role in Zuckerkandl's advocacy of Moser as a truly modern designer because they enabled readers to witness how Moser 'translated his mental conceptualisation into concrete form' (Zuckerkandl 1904: 232). The photographs were taken across the entire apartment and included servant quarters and kitchen, semi-public rooms (dining room, breakfast room, reception area and hallway) as well as some of the apartment's more intimate spaces such as the boudoir, office, and marital bedroom [Figures XX.1 and XX.2].

Zuckerkandl located Moser's design scheme within the parameters of the Wiener Werkstätte's work programme that called for outstanding craftsmanship, high-quality materials, functionality, and the integration of each design element into an aesthetically unified arrangement (Hoffmann 1904/05: 268). Zuckerkandl promoted Moser as one of Vienna's most promising young *Raumkünstler* (spatial artists) because, in her view, he successfully realised the Wiener Werkstätte's core design principle of a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Zuckerkandl 1904: 331). Her detailed description of the breakfast room, for example, leaves no doubt that modern design was Moser's calling [Figure XX.3]:

The impression of the small breakfast- and writing room is one of peace and quiet. The furniture is made of Thuya wood with lemonwood and brass inlays in the shape of small figures that lend a beautiful Havana sheen. In addition, the yellow velvet chair covers, the mother-of-pearl grey silk wallcoverings and the striped, white -gold stencilling above, convey a most elegant colour effect. The intarsia shows a repeat of a chalice-like pattern, which is also used on the lighting-fixtures and carpets. The construction of the lady's bureau, which is equipped on the inside with all kinds of compartments and doors, is excellent because it accommodates a chair that can be pushed into the closed bureau and thus creates a completely smooth surface. (Zuckerkandl 1904: 336)

Moser's interior for Gertrud Loew's first marital home occupies an important place in the history of the Wiener Werkstätte. It was not only discussed at length in Zuckerkandl's essay but it also featured prominently in the Wiener Werkstätte's portfolio map that was typically shown to prospective clients. Design historians Paul Asenbaum and Ernst Ploil recently suggested that the Wiener Werkstätte rejected conventional advertising strategies in lieu of 'specially-produced photographs of the interior décor of its newly opened premises comprising an office and showroom' (Witt-Döring and Stagg 2017: 549). The beautifully staged photographs in Zuckerkandl's essay functioned along the same lines. They targeted the journal's upwardly mobile readerships as potential clients for the Wiener Werkstätte. Yet, despite its extraordinary reception as a truly modern *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Moser's interior has virtually disappeared from critical accounts of the Wiener Werkstätte. Design historians tend to privilege Josef Hoffmann's emerging geometric style as a nod towards modernism over Koloman Moser's sinuous lines and luxurious surfaces that are wrongly seen as vestiges of Vienna's opulent Secession Style. These binaries are deeply entrenched in central European design history and are only gradually being re-examined.¹¹

Modern Design, Cultural Aspiration and Unwieldy Objects

The remainder of this essay now explores the complex exchanges between agency and design within the physical and ideological parameters of Gertrud Loew's modern interior. As previously mentioned, the Loew family moved amongst Vienna's elite cultural circles. Following into her father's footsteps, Gertrud commissioned one of the imminent founders of the Wiener Werkstätte to turn a historicist Ring Street apartment into a modern *Gesamtkunstwerk* fit for a fashionable young couple. Gertrud Loew had recently been painted by the Habsburg Empire's most coveted portraitist, Gustav Klimt and she was a rising star on

Vienna's illustrious cultural-political horizon. But a lot was at stake for the twenty-year old Gertrud Loew. This commission marked her transition from a carefully protected daughter to head of her own household and custodian of modern culture. Despite her young age, Gertrud Loew beautifully mastered the challenge. She first aligned herself with one of the most fashionable and progressive designers in town and then publicised this alliance in one of central Europe's leading applied art journals. Zuckerkandl did not name the residents of Moser's 'Apartment for a Young Couple' at the centre of her essay. But Gustav Klimt also rarely identified his sitters and guessing their identities when first exhibited formed part of the work's cultural capital (Bonyhady 2011: 15). Those who mattered and those who moved in the right social circles knew. Gertrud Loew used Koloman Moser's custom-designed interior to reconfigure her class and gender identities during a crucial moment in her life. She thus consciously and carefully deployed design as agency. But she also acted as an agent of modern design by providing Moser with his first major commission and firmly inscribing the young designer into Viennese modernism.

Janis Staggs recently proposed in an essay on modern jewellery that

women who wore Werkstätte jewellery were seen as independent and progressive thinkers and were instantly identified as sympathetic to the firms' high-minded cause ... [The pieces] intended to capture the unique and individual character of its wearer, as expressed through the artistic vision of the designer. The patrons of these works demonstrated their alliance with the firm's philosophy through their avid acquisition of these avant-garde designs (2008: 26; 46).

These socio-cultural associations hold true for Gertrud Loew. She already wore a fashionable reform dress in Klimt's 1902 portrait and would have been a regular customer of the Flöge Sisters' *Modesalon* on Vienna's chic Mariahilferstrasse, which opened in 1904 with interiors by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. She would have accessorised her outfits with Wiener Werkstätte jewellery and cut a very modish figure. In her public performance of ideal femininity and fashionability, Gertrud Loew enacted prevailing gender roles that governed early twentieth-century society. And she declared her support of modern design through the

built environment. This was not without risk for an assimilated Jewish woman in the conservative surroundings of early twentieth-century Vienna and ‘demonstrates degrees of self-will, self-preservation, and self-presentation’ on Loew’s part (Blossom and Turpin 2008: 2).¹²

Gertrud Loew, now Eisler von Terramare, held regular soirées in her newly designed home. These events played a vital role in securing her place within the ranks of Vienna’s second society. The city’s strict social calendar was dictated by women of an older generation and Gertrud Loew deployed her Wiener Werkstätte interior to claim a place among this social elite. But she also signalled her allegiance to a younger generation of designers and their patrons. As previously mentioned, she brought considerable cultural capital into her marriage, but she could not fall back on her family’s reputation alone. Gertrud Loew required a more pro-active strategy to realise her social ambitions. If culture occupies the space between experience and expectation, or in this instance between experience and ambition, then Gertrud Loew’s salon in a purpose-designed Wiener Werkstätte setting was irrefutably implicated in the complex process of modern identity formation. A discussion of Vienna’s vibrant salon culture exceeds the parameter of this essay, but this social practice offered an important emancipatory space for women like Gertrud Loew, who were highly cultured, wealthy and more often than not, assimilated Jews. Hannah Arendt described Jewish salons in Berlin as ‘sites for individuals who had learned to project themselves through conversation’ (Arendt 1974: 45). Salons provided important opportunities for social interaction and imbued women with agency, maybe even generating a ‘women’s culture’ (Heyden-Rynsch 1992). This social practice was always tied to a distinct physical environment and Moser’s decorative scheme fixed Gertrud Loew’s salon in time and space.

The physical environment situated Loew’s agency. Gertrud Loew thus drew on well-established conventions of salon culture to cement the couple’s position within Vienna’s

second society. In the process, she strategically deployed her Moser-designed spaces to signal the newlyweds' support of the city's progressive cultural circles. Loew claimed authority as a producer of intellectual and material culture. Her interior's modern design language was of utter importance here because style represents 'an important means whereby social groups project their constructed identities and stake their claims in the world' (Powers 1995: 384). Gertrud Loew commissioned Koloman Moser's decorative schemes to signal her superior aesthetic judgment. Pierre Bourdieu long argued that taste marks class (1979). But Elana Shapira recently pointed out that good taste played an even more significant role in the complex processes of Jewish identification in fin-de-siècle Vienna. She skilfully argued that Jewish patrons 'formed a new cultural program that embedded the Jewish micro-narrative firmly in the macro-narrative of European history, so that Jews ... would become part of the fundament of Viennese high culture' (2016: 5). Gertrud Loew shaped this 'cultural narrative' of modern art, architecture and design by first commissioning Moser and then showcasing her modern interiors in text and image (Zuckermandl's essay) as well as practice (salon culture). In the process, she divorced herself from well-established salonnières such as Josephine von Wertheimstein (1820-1894) or Yella Oppenheimer (1854-1943) whose interiors were firmly anchored in the Ring Street's predominant historicism. In their bid for cultural supremacy, advocates of modern art and design vehemently rejected historicism as an outmoded style associated with Vienna's old aristocracy. Vienna's Gertrud Loew declared her allegiance to a new generation of young acculturated Jewish salonnières such as Lili Waerndorfer (1876-1952), Eugenia Primavesi (1874-1862), and Serena Lederer (1867-1943), all active supporters of Viennese modernism in art, architecture and design.

Moser's furniture and decorative objects, however, did not simply function as markers of Loew's class and gender identities. As discussed above, they were active agents in and of themselves (Latour 1992). Taking her cue from anthropology, Alison Clarke emphasises that

‘objects may transcend the desire to control them [...] their very materiality may act to create unintentional consequences’ (Clarke 2002: 148). Gertrud Loew used salon culture and, to a certain extent, Zuckerkandl’s essay in *Dekorative Kunst* to embed the objects and spatial settings of her modern interior within the specific politics of liberalism, capitalism, Jewish acculturation and gender equality. Sadly, the material objects in question could also embody more sinister expressions of anti-Semitism and misogyny. This essay closes with an example of how the material properties of Loew’s deliberate aesthetic choices could be appropriated by different factions within Vienna’s high culture to launch a virulent critique of, what they called, ‘*le goût juif*’ (Jewish taste). The eminent architect and critic Adolf Loos (1870-1933) occupied centre stage in these theatrics.

Antisemitism and the Politics of Style

Loos embarked on his public crusade against the Secession and its elite patrons in his acerbic essay ‘Poor Little Rich Man’ published on 28 April 1900 in the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*. He attacked the Secession’s principle cultural platform of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a portentous fad that wreaked havoc with contemporary architecture and design. Loos told the story of a rich man who had everything money could buy. He lived happily with his wife and children in a modern home. But one day, he decided that art was missing from their lives and he commissioned an ‘interior architect’ to redecorate every single room:

The rich man was overjoyed. Overjoyed he went through the new rooms. Art everywhere he looked. Art in everything and anything. When he turned a door handle, he grabbed hold of art, when he sank into a chair, he sank into art, when he buried his tired bones under the pillows, he burrowed into art, his feet sank in art when he walked across the carpet. He indulged himself with outrageous fervour in art. Since his plates were artistically decorated, he cut his boeuf à l’oignon with still more energy. People praised and were envious of him. The Art periodicals glorified his name as one of the foremost patrons of the arts. His rooms were used as public examples, studied, described, explained (Loos [1900] 2003: 18).

However, the family was soon embroiled in a nightmare because they were not allowed to add, move or take anything away from the architect's master vision. The story culminates in the 'poor little rich man's realisation that he would never experience happiness again and might as well learn to 'walk about with one's own corpse' (Loos 2003: 21).

Loos's essay displays its author's famous wit and sharp tongue. He did not sugar-coat his criticism of the Secession. Today, readers know that Loos honed his argument for the ultimate assault on the Wiener Werkstätte and their clientele, which was to come through in his iconic tract 'Ornament and Crime' (1908, delivered as a lecture in Berlin 1910). 'Poor Little Rich Man' was written two years before Gustav Klimt painted Gertrud Loew and three years before she commissioned Koloman Moser's to design her marital home. But the essay was undoubtedly levelled against the likes of Gertrud Loew – wealthy, acculturated Jews who supported a vision of modern living that did not align with Loos aspirations. Loos' critique imbued the very objects used by Gertrud Loew to declare her modernity with negative stereotypes of commerce (art market), effeminacy, fickle fashion and '*le gout juif*'. Moreover, Loos' essay tapped into an increasingly regressive political landscape that witnessed the populist Christian Social Party's win of the majority seats in Vienna's *Gemeinderat* (municipal council) in 1895 and confirmed the party's openly anti-Semitic leader Karl Lueger as mayor (1897).¹³ This created a socio-political landscape that bred an aggressive type of anti-Semitism and destabilised Jewish claims to modern culture as their calling card into Vienna's second society.

Gertrud Loew's carefully projected modernity was under threat. As discussed above, objects enact their own agencies and their meaning is never stable. Loos' scathing attack of the Secession and its patrons reveals that the very same objects used by Gertrud Loew to cement her position as one of Vienna's taste makers enacted very different identities and narratives for Loos and his supporters. It could be argued Loos simply read Moser's modern

furniture and decorative objects through a different ideological lens. Social history and its focus on context are one of design history's mainstays but material culture studies open up exciting new critical vistas. This anthology asks readers to consider the 'authority of objects' (Betts 2004) but objects can be quite unwieldy and Jean Baudrillard, for example, believes them 'to be more clever, more cynical, more ingenious than the subject, which it awaits at every turn' (1999: 259). Baudrillard's characteristic scepticism opens up fruitful ways in which to separate agency from intentionality, but it also runs the risk of relativism. Design historians have the disciplinary tools to avoid this postmodern conundrum because they (should) launch their critical analysis with an investigation of the material and formal properties of the objects in the first instance.

Many of the magnificent pieces of furniture and decorative objects from Gertrud Loew's marital home were lost in the maelstrom of history. When the couple divorced in 1905, the household was divided and Moser's unified interiors dismantled. Two world wars further obfuscated the provenance of individual objects. But some key pieces survived and are now housed in museums and private collections across the world. Moser's writing desk for Gertrud Loew, for example, is now in London's Victoria and Albert Museum [Figure XX.4]. As described in Zuckerkandl's quote earlier in this essay, the desk was veneered with Thuya wood and inlaid with satinwood and brass. Thuya is a rare conifer found primarily in Morocco's Atlas mountain range. The tree's root produces a sought-after burl wood but requires expert carpentry skills. Moser commissioned the Hungarian-born carpenter Caspar Hrazdil to make Loew's desk (Pichler 2007: 178). Thuya wood's natural colour ranges from orange to reddish brown and Moser complimented its warm tones by specifying brass fixtures and brass inlay for his eight stylised female figures. A geometric pattern of satinwood veneer plays with positive and negative space. The desk rests on metal feet and once opened, reveals a mahogany interior with oak-lined drawers. Furniture historian Christopher Wilk rightly sees

the desk as combining ‘the elegance of early nineteenth-century Biedermeier furniture with modern simplicity and geometry’ (1996: 194). But the desk’s most enigmatic feature are evoked through its chair: when pushed into the desk, it completely disappears into its surface design.

Moser described the progress of his first major commission in a letter to his future wife Editha Mautner von Markhof as ‘... both a torture and a joy. Slowly you see the things taking shape which you have planned on paper, and then you find good things and bad things’ (Pichler 2007: 178). Moser clearly referred to the interstitial space between design and execution, but his observation of ‘things taking shape’ gains poignancy when put into the prism of agency. The writing desk only comes into its full being when its formal properties are explored through the agency of Gertrud Loew’s body – opening the desk, pulling out the chair, moulding her body into the chair etc. Robert Rotenberg turns to quantum physics to encapsulate these fascinating interactions between agency, materiality and form: ‘Like a particle and a wave in quantum physics, the object and its agency coexist in the same moment but are apprehended at different moment. When the object is observed, its agency disappears, and when the agency is observed, the object disappears’ (2014: 38).

Loos tried to convince readers that life could not happen in a stylistically unified interior because a *Gesamtkunstwerk* deadened the space; objects in aesthetic harmony kill life. Loos had a point. Moser’s interior for Gertrud Loew’s marital home featured in Zuckerkandl’s essay is devoid of people and staged like a series of showrooms. The photographs are like a ‘memento mori’ in Roland Barthes’ sense of the word: they fix the spaces and objects as real, as having been there, but they lack any kind of human activity (Barthes 1980). There is no sense of the life performed in these interiors. But when design historians closely engage with the material properties of Gertrud Loew’s writing desk, for example, the room comes to life. One has to simply imagine Gertrud Loew opening the door;

walking into room accompanied by the rustling of her dress; pulling out her desk chair; smoothing the gossamer fabrics of her skirt before sitting down; reaching out to pull open an oak-lined drawer of her desk; collecting a sheet of paper; dipping her pen into ink; pausing; leaning slightly forward to begin writing her correspondence. Projecting lived experience into Zuckerkandl's photographs re-animates the supposedly desolate interior. And it reminds us that design culture cannot not be seen outside the prism of agency.

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Endnotes

¹ The painting stayed in the family until 1941 when the Austrian film maker, known Nazi, and self-proclaimed illegitimate son of Klimt, Gustav Ucicky acquired the work without legal title (Kennedy 2015). The Ucickys stowed Klimt's portrait away in their Vienna apartment for decades. It only resurfaced when Ucicky's widow deeded the portrait to the Klimt Foundation in 2013. It immediately attracted public attention as well as an ownership claim from Gertrud Loew's heirs. The proceeds from the Sotheby's sale were divided between the Loew heirs and the Foundation.

² Art historians consider this painting as a key work in Klimt's oeuvre because it opened up new directions for portraiture in terms of format and visual language (Weidinger 2007).

³ The so-called 'separate spheres model' has come under increasing pressure from gender historian who reject the limitations it puts on women's actual historical experiences (e.g. Davidson 1998).

⁴ Sanatorium culture played an important social and medical role in fin-de-siècle society, which witnessed a drastic increase in nervous disorders (Topp 1997; Wieber 2011).

⁵ Anton Loew's collection included important paintings such as Ferdinand Hodler's *Der Auserwählte* (1893/94) and Gustav Klimt's *Judith I* (1901). By 1907, Gertrud was a serious patron of art and design herself.

⁶ This social construct was also known as Vienna's money-nobility (*Geldadel*) or Ring Street society (referring to their residences along this prestigious boulevard).

⁷ Klimt historians commonly refer to her as Gerta Felsövényi, but I maintain her maiden name throughout this essay to underline her agency as a progressive patron in her own right.

⁸ Gertrud Felsövényi first left for Berlin on 23 April 1939 and then emigrated to California. Her son Anthony Felsövényi (1914-2013) spent decades trying to get key art works from his mother's collection restituted but he sadly died shortly before his claim to Klimt's portrait was successfully resolved.

⁹ Planning permission for minor alterations on the *bel étage* were approved by Vienna's *Baupolizei* (building authority) on 21 November 1902 (Pichler 2007: 187).

¹⁰ The Wiener Werkstätte was founded in 1903 by the architect Josef Hoffman, the designer Koloman Moser and the financier Fritz Waerndorfer. A discussion of the ethos and history of the Wiener Werkstätte exceeds the parameters of this essay but a recent exhibition at the Neue Galerie in New York generated a comprehensive catalogue with excellent scholarly essays and state-of-the art photographs (Witt-Döring and Staggs 2017).

¹¹ Even Christian Witt-Döring, undoubtedly one of the most prominent historians of the *Wiener Werkstätte*, most recently argued that 'Moser's design for the Eisler apartment still corresponded to very traditional ways of displaying status when it came to its colours, the atmospheric values of its materials, and the arrangement of its furniture in the room (Witt-Döring and Staggs 2017: 221).

¹² I thank the editors of this volume for bringing this fascinating essay to my attention.

¹³ Lueger was first elected as mayor of Vienna in 1895 but Emperor Franz Joseph refused to confirm him in office. He did this on three more occasions but his hand was eventually forced by a personal intercession of Pope Leo XIII and Lueger became Vienna's mayor in 1897 and stayed in office until 10 March 1910.