

**THE POLITICS OF FASHION.
A STUDY OF THE HUNGARIAN FASHION DESIGN CONTEST “GOMBOLD ÚJRA!”
BETWEEN 2011 AND 2012**

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the critique of the political utilization of fashion in relation to national identity politics by focusing on the institutional discourse of the Hungarian governmentally initiated national fashion contest Gombold Újra! Divat a Magyar (*Re-buttoned: Hungarian is in Fashion!*). The institutional representation of this fashion contest is foregrounding the aim to reconstitute a renewed, stable and homogeneous nation-state identity. The obligation to produce contemporary fashion design re-using the Hungarian national folklore heritage utilizes a supposed collective tradition together with the generative, value producing social structures and ideologies of fashion as a cultural phenomenon. The result is a theatrical spectacle which flashes out the political ideologies of a new-nationalism, and a desire to gain respectability to the nation, through recycling the national dress heritage in the context of fashion.

Although the context of ‘fashion’ is evoked by the rhetoric of the contest and its representation, due to its overtly extensive ideological saturation, the stress on creating a ‘national fashion’ as a counterpart and a concurrent to ‘Western fashion’ gets a much stronger emphasis than the aim to participate in the transnational discourse of fashion industry. In other words, while the governmental initiative ‘brands itself’ as the supporter of Hungarian fashion-talent’s access to ‘the fashion market’ its rhetoric, impregnated with historical politics (re)produces the ideological stance of the ‘other’ fighting for ‘access’ through the demand of acknowledgment by the assumed Western power center(s) of fashion.

I am particularly interested in the interrogation of this concept of a ‘national fashion’ from a fashion studies perspective, informed by feminist thinking. I am also aware of its situatedness at the intersections of a Western theoretical practice, that references a particularly transnational industrial and cultural phenomenon, and a post-socialist Hungarian popular cultural context, which shows the symptoms of infections from state-politics.

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1. Introduction

This thesis deals with the discourse of the political utilization of fashion in relation to national identity politics by focusing on the institutional discourse of the Hungarian governmentally initiated national fashion contest ‘Gombold Újra! Divat a Magyar’ (*Re-buttoned: Hungarian is in Fashion!*). The contest was first launched in 2011 approaching its 4th year in 2014. It is primarily targeting young fashion design students, who are invited to design mini-collections, with an obligation to get inspired by the Hungarian national dress heritage. According to the opening speech of the 2011 event given by the spokesperson of the Government Anna Nagy, the reasoning behind this thematic focus was “to draw attention to the successes of Hungarian fashion design and to the economic and creative potentials of the industry” and also to “show the world the less familiar face of the creative Hungary.”¹ The self-definition available at the official website of the 2014 did not change much since 2011 and despite of expanding from national to regional the goals remain the same, namely: “The goal of the ‘Gombold Újra!’ competition is to show that Central Europe not only has rich traditions in the culture of clothing, but also a sparkling present and a promising future.”²

In both the national and regional case there is a strong aim to (re)constitute and represent a stable and coherent national (or regional) identity through the means of fashion design,

1 (“A különleges pályázattal a magyar divattervezés sikereire, az iparágban rejlő gazdasági és kreatív lehetőségekre kívánják felhívni a figyelmet. (...) A rendezvény része a magyar soros EU elnökség tiszteletére rendezett kulturális programoknak, ahol Magyarország egy kevésbé ismert, kreatív arcát tudja megmutatni az érdeklődőknek.”) Extracted from the official press release of the awarding ceremony in 2011. [https://hu-hu.facebook.com/notes/gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/sajt%C3%B3k%C3%B6zlem%C3%A9ny-gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/150996368301324](https://hu.hu.facebook.com/notes/gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/sajt%C3%B3k%C3%B6zlem%C3%A9ny-gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/150996368301324) accessed on 23/02/2014.

2 <http://gomboldujra.designterminal.hu/en/informacio.html#1> accessed on 23/02/2014.

by utilizing the generative, value producing social structures and ideologies of fashion as a cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, the overall national reception of the initiative both in professional circles and among the larger part of the society was rather hostile and it has been a critically referenced issue in “the remaining fragments” of the independent Hungarian media in the past years. The general aspects of criticism directed towards the event series did not change considerably in the past four years of its existence. These have marked the event harmful for the development of the Hungarian fashion industry, lacking skilled fashion business professionals in the organizing board, spending fortunes on organizing the annual, spectacular contest-closing fashion shows, but providing insubstantial prizes to the winners who are closed up in an ideologically overloaded representational context which not only fails to address the transnational fashion business but is unintelligible from its perspectives (see among others Vincze 2011, Martinkó 2011, Zanin 2011, Zanin 2012, Lukács 2012, Rácz 2013, Iványos 2013).

Directing the focus of my research to the discourse and the institutional representation of the first two years of the contest I am particularly interested in how does the discursive formation of the aim to “re-design” the Hungarian national identity through the utilization of intersecting ideologies of nation, gender and fashion provide an ideologically loaded theatrical spectacle the performative values of which undermine and obstruct all of the targeted goals of the contest. My research is not invested in finding out the exact causes of the inability of ‘Gombold Újra!’ to serve the aims it says it wants to serve, since these have already been well represented in critical media. What I am interested in instead is to look at the particular ways of meaning production employed by the initiating body and try to assess the intersecting discourses which produce and shape the power relations and

ideologies of the values of a ‘national fashion’ developed in post-socialist Hungary, setting out the task of ‘generating respect’ towards the country both in national and international terms. In other words I am interested in the analysis of the ideological framework in which the political utilization of fashion is embedded, to see how it becomes a performative spectacle of the (re)generation of a Hungarian national identity. Even though since 2013 the fashion contest has been re-branded to Central European Fashion Days, it has kept its grounding ideologies which are invested in the excavation and re-implementation of national folklore heritages to contemporary fashion³ and the support of the designers working in this spirit to enter the global market. Therefore I am focusing my research on the first two years of the contest as the period of the establishment and the institutionalization of the ideological utilization of fashion as a popular cultural spectacle and as a political tool for a renewed cultural value transmission.

This research engages in discourse with other contemporary examples of attempting to forge renewed national identities through fashion, and to achieve an idea of a higher ‘respectability’ for the nation through its discourse. All of the examples that I am going to cite come from a non-Western or post-socialist Central Eastern European geopolitical context, and their desires to be ‘respected’ through the utilization of fashion in the context of a national identity usually have a twofold direction. Firstly they are directed to an assumed Western power center, which should ‘acknowledge’ and accept the(se) national fashion(s) as equally valuable to that of the Western fashion. Secondly they are also targeting a national context, an assumed collective national identity which should gain a

³ See the collection of the aims of the competition at the official website <http://gomboldujra.designterminal.hu/en/informacio.html#1> accessed on 05//06/2014.

‘national pride’ through the acknowledged fashionability of its fashion in the authorized Western sense. The Hungarian example that I am going to show here shares this twofold ideological directionality, but it is also different from the other examples. One of the differences is that even though the Hungarian fashion contest claims the intention to support Hungarian fashion designers’ access to Western fashion markets, this ideologically constructed enterprise is unintelligible from the perspectives of the targeted market, due to various reasons. Whereas the other examples come from perspectives which ‘read’ fashion primarily as a consumer related industry and business, the Hungarian example has rendered an idea of a ‘national fashion’ primarily as a media for re-articulated cultural value transmission, which could serve as a popular cultural tool for the popularization of new national values embedded in historical politics. By creating a theatrical spectacle to show of the ‘fashionable’ outcomes of the folklore-fashion marriage, and by enclosing the ‘international advocacy’ of the winners in fashion shows held in the Balassi Hungarian Cultural Institutes around the world, the organizing governmental body enshrines the creative outcomes of the ‘Gombold Újra!’ contest in the wider discourse of re-framing Hungarian cultural identity, re-writing Hungarian history and re-organizing the ‘collective memory’ of the ‘Hungarian heritage’ in order to *fit in* a contemporary post-socialist new-nationalist political narrative.

Approaching the question from this perspective I believe that my research is going to correspond to various intersecting discourses within social sciences. First of all I would like to provide a non-Western perspective to the interdisciplinary discourse of fashion studies, which has developed since the 1990s as an interdisciplinary, but predominantly Western scholarly discourse (Tseëlon, 2010). I believe that through shifting focus to the

non-Western and post-socialist Central Eastern European contexts of the social and cultural phenomenon of fashion and their engendered relationships to the Western idea(s) of fashion a wider scope of the politics of popular cultural value production could be accessible. The gendered divisions of labor between the processes of ‘proper’ Western fashion and its self-colonizing ‘others’ could provide a deeper understanding of the uneven power relations behind the debated notion of ‘global fashion’. This research, conducted from a perspective informed by gender and women’s studies could also provide a new stance for the feminist approach of fashion related issues. Although body politics and post socialism is a well-represented topic in theoretical literature, nevertheless apart from historical works on state-socialist and post-socialist fashion (Medvedev, 2011; Bartlett, 2010; Simonovics, 2009; Valuch, 2004) the theoretical consideration of fashion in Hungary as a matter for social or cultural analysis is very minimal (Zanin; 2009, Péter 2007; Klaniczay, 1982) and there has been no work done on fashion and body politics in a Hungarian context, from a perspective informed by the critical discourses of gender and women’s studies. By directing an intersectional feminist viewpoint to the study of the social, cultural and political relations of non-Western and post-socialist fashions and their relationship to Western understandings of fashion as a cultural and industrial instrument, the previously one directional feminist critique of the contemporary Western post-feminist discourse of fashion could shift to a much wider perspective. Fashion concepts that have been developed in these cultural contexts could not be theoretically accessible along the uncritical adaptation of the Western feminist scholarship on fashion which is primarily situated in the context of the critique of post-

feminism (among others see McRobbie: 2009, Whelehan: 1995, Gorton: 2007, Thornham: 2007, Smith: 1995).

Thirdly this research could provide an addition to the existing discourse on historical policy, which has become a relevant question with great importance in the past few years in many post-socialist countries of Central Eastern Europe. Even though the utilization of history for the political purposes of developing a new nation state identity has been a significant topic in historical science (see Miller and Lipman, 2012), the popular cultural appropriation of the utilization of re-written historical narratives has not yet been explored.

When I have mentioned this to Gábor Gyáni, who provided me with many valuable insights about the political aspects of re-writing history and to whom I am very grateful for this help, he whisked and smiled, saying that it is absolutely pointless to conduct a research on such a trivial and ephemeral something that fashion is in this matter, since it would not reveal anything further but only reinforce the knowledge that we all know already from studying more ‘worthy’ parts of history. I have conducted this research partly to prove the professor that studying fashion in this context is not only not ephemeral but it is one of the most important sites of shared value production and therefore it is an absolutely crucial site for research within history and social sciences. Because of its multidirectional impact on popular culture, economy, industry, politics, public diplomacy and the everyday life by mobilizing power structures of age, race, class, gender, geopolitics and body politics fashion is indeed a very serious business. I have chosen this site of popular cultural value production because for some reason the Hungarian Government has decided to invest in its ideological utilization. By trying to

walk through the steps of this ideological utilization I will try to examine the effects and impacts of the discursive implementation of historical politics in this particular case.

2. The ideological appropriation of Fashion

In this chapter I intend to show the ways the national fashion-design contest relies on a particular nationalist ideology and appropriates a historical narrative for the political purposes of national self-identification (Miller, 2012:1). I will argue that this process of the politicization of history is not a unique Hungarian phenomenon but a process which has shown significant similarities across the region of Central Eastern Europe.⁴

The recent publication of the volume edited by Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman: *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*⁵ provides a valuable insight to the Eastern European phenomenon of politicizing history within a region. After briefly introducing the general contextual framework of this specific historical discourse I will draw on certain analogies in the history of Hungarian fashion and in the patriotic Historical narrative of Hungary to show how the initiation and the institutional discourse of ‘Gombold Újra!’ fashion contest reiterates the historical policy and cultural crusade of the patriotic defense of the homeland, with a growing public and institutional impact on the articulation of a Hungarian national identity.

As Miller argues in his introduction, the shared heritage of the Communist domination within the region was a general censorship of historical reflections on the two World Wars and the interwar period motivated by the aim to establish a historical narrative for

⁴ I am using the term “Central Eastern Europe” here to refer to all post-communist countries except the former Yugoslavia. I understand that this is a debated term, yet at this point I am not going to engage in this debate. I will only discuss some of the geopolitical implications and problems of the politics of this particular regional identification in relation to “Europeanness” later in this chapter.

⁵ Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman ed. (2012) *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, Central European University Press, Budapest and New York

the Communist movement and to fight against the enemies of the regime (Miller, 2012:2). This silencing provided a ‘blank space’ in historiography, covering some parts of the collective memory in the new (more or less) pluralistic and democratized societies of the region, such as the unspoken Holocaust and the participation of the local population in it. There is a turn towards public historical inquiry that reshapes the values and the status of history and historians. This results in four key postulations in the similar ideological grounding of historical politics in Eastern Europe. These, according to Miller are the (1) appropriation of history and memory as a terrain of political fighting with enemies, (2) the assertion that the political appropriation of history is an ‘unavoidable evil’, therefore it should not be a reason for concern, (3) the duty of the historian as the patriot-raising protector of the nation, thus leaving no space for dialogue among the different critical interpretations of the past, and (4) ‘the historical justification of historical politics made under the pretext of an allegedly pitiful state of patriotism and the inconsistent teaching of history at schools’ (Miller, 2012:14). The fostering of national patriotism from this perspective is mostly linked to the activities of the right-wing governments (Gyáni, 2012). Focusing on the case of the fashion contest, within this framework, therefore allows me to focus on the multiplicity of the sites of social and cultural value production as a matter of historical policy.

2.1. Why ‘Cool Britannia’ ?

The use of popular cultural terrains of value production in the development of a tailored “designer-brand” for a nation was perhaps most explicitly conducted in the mid-1990s ‘Cool Britannia’ campaign of the United Kingdom under the New Labour Government of

Tony Blair. In my reading the similarities in the initial agendas and the institutional implementation of the political communication strategies indicate that the UK case might have served as guiding example to the Hungarian governmental body of the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Justice which has contracted a London based strategic advisory group to develop the new nation-brand strategy for Hungary after the right-wing FIDESZ party led by Viktor Orbán won the Hungarian Governmental elections in 2010.⁶ Nevertheless, one would fail to assume a direct line of causality between the accreditation of the British strategic consultancy group and the organization of the ‘Gombold Újra’ fashion contest as its result, since the public call for tenders for the contest was published a few weeks before the announcement of the accreditation.⁷ Yet, the choice of a British strategic consultancy group to participate in the formation of a new European communication strategy for the Hungarian Government implicates an extended desire to find ways in which the state can adapt and implement some of the methods and techniques of revitalizing the image of Britain.

The most striking similarity between the two nation re-branding campaigns is that they had a key role in the political communications strategies of the two countries’ EU Presidency, which in both cases came a year after the new political forces won the elections. In the United Kingdom it was Tony Blair’s New Labour Party that won the

⁶ See the official press release initiated by the Department of Public Diplomacy and Relations at the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Justice at <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kozigazgatasi-es-igazsagugyi-miniszterium/tarsadalmi-kapcsolatokert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/vonzo-hiteles-magyarorszag-a-cel-tudatos-nemzetkozi-kommunikacios-strategia-keszul> accessed on 05/05/2014. Although the Department has an obligation to produce and provide English language translations to its press releases, according to my research this has not been a systematic practice. Only some press releases have been translated and this is not one of them. Although the role of translation in the international political communication of contemporary Hungary could be a very insightful field of analysis, I will not address the issue in more depth here.

⁷ The press release quoted above was published on 07/03/2011 while the call for tenders for the first competition was announced on 18/02/2011. See <http://palyazatok.org/gombold-ujra-divattervezes-palyazat/> accessed on 04/06/2014.

elections in 1997 after two decades of Tory government, while in Hungary 13 years later it is a center-right wing government winning the national elections a year before the European Union Presidency in 2011. The New Labour replaced a conservative government which ruled for 18 years whereas in Hungary the right-wing conservatives followed two governing cycles of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP). Yet, despite this difference in the political ideologies the two governments decided to follow similar initiatives of re-designing the “national image” through the means of creative value-based communication and thus formulated popular cultural representational frameworks for a renewed national identity which are rather distant in terms of their discourses of value production.

According to the study of John Michael Lee, the British New Labour administration pursued to improve the image of Britain in international media and position Tony Blair as a ‘celebrity’ shortly after taking office in 1997. Following Lee:

“Improvement made by the Labour government after 1997 in the projection of Britain overseas, sometimes called ‘rebranding’, were part of the contest between the political parties. The reform agenda of New Labour in opposition included modernizing the constitution, and placing the country in the forefront of the world’s knowledge economy. But diplomats were already familiar with marketing techniques as a result of new methods of public/private partnership in the delivery of services, and of commercial sponsorship of cultural events. The British council had reformed itself. Dissent in the Conservative Party after the Treaty of Maasricht gave New Labour an opportunity to adopt a ‘creative nation’ approach and to be more constructive within the European Union. The Millenium celebrations set the tone. But there has been no fundamental change in the making of foreign policy.” (Lee, 2001:679)

The ‘Cool Britannia’ phenomenon is one particular articulation of this agenda to renew the image of the nation and forging a new identity. The popular cultural investment in rebranding the nation was understood to provide a link with the younger voters and also to utilize the rich popular cultural heritage of the UK which form the 1960s has shaped

and influenced youth culture, subcultures as well as popular art and music on a transnational level. The British campaign of nation rebranding, unlike the Hungarian event, had the privileges of drawing on a 'close' cultural reference which is already seen to be attractive and 'cool'. As part of an institutional reform the British Creative Industries Task Force⁸ and the Design Council was established in order to improve the support of the creative industries and through their successes promote the creative capacities of the nation (Lee, 2001:681). As a result of negotiations among professional organizations the Government's institutional reform met with the support of the creative industry and led to the increase of the inland popularity of the government (mostly in the early years) as well as a gain of a vast international media presence. Lee, who is particularly interested in the examination of the 'Cool Britannia' campaign in relation to the British foreign policy is nevertheless disappointed when he states that, although this political campaign was necessary to gain and to keep political power, the overall enhancement of the promotion and accessibility of the new British national identity and its creative popular outcomes did not provide a sufficient break with the former foreign policy of the nation (Lee, 2001:688).

In my reading there is a very direct relationship between the British campaign and the Hungarian practices of political communication from 2010. It is important to see that despite its high visibility and popularity, the 'Cool Britannia' phenomenon proved to be ill proportioned in terms of the overtly extensive representation of the nation-brand the success of which had to necessarily rely on former engendering practices of ideological

8 The Creative Industries Task Force together with the Music Industry Forum and Film Policy Review Group worked together in the evaluation and prediction of the value of national creativity in terms of a national income (ibid).

value transmission. In contrast, in the Hungarian case, although there were similar desires of conducting an overall institutional reform, the most prominent of that was the reform of the constitution in 2012, ‘design communication’ came about as a highly visible replacement of actual political communication, while the institutional reforms as well as the re-writing of the Hungarian National Constitution lacked any discussions or the joint work of experts and governmental bodies. All of the Hungarian ‘reform processes’ were carried out by internal governmental forces, leading to heavy criticism in national and international media and a few EU inspections regarding some aspects of the Hungarian governments policy making practices.⁹

Whereas the British Government were quick and eager to distance themselves from the terminology of ‘re-branding’ (Lee, 2001: 679), the Hungarian official communication employs this terminology as an institutionalized concept which explicitly legitimizes the aim to re-formulate the national identity and provide a new Hungarian characterology for an ‘improved Hungary.’ The Balassi Institute¹⁰ (just like the British Council) that is a state institution responsible for the professional direction of cultural affairs and Hungarian education abroad, was appointed to be the institution responsible for the ‘shaping of the nation-brand image,’ whereas the Nation-Brand Committee, originally initiated by the former Socialist government, was reformed shortly after FIDESZ took office in 2010. The committee worked under the Ministry of Public Administration and

⁹ All of the Hungarian ‘reform processes’ were carried out by internal governmental forces, leading to heavy criticism in national and international media and a few EU inspections regarding some aspects of the Hungarian governments policy making practices. Most of these were related to the policy making strategies of the Hungarian Government, together with several points of the new Hungarian constitution, incorporating the assurance of independent media and independent courts of justice, and the Government’s national protectionist policies in relation to the energetic and banking sectors. See the related press release from the European Commission at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-327_en.htm accessed on 04/06/2014.

¹⁰ <http://www.balassiintezet.hu/en/balassi-institute-hq/#.U4L3zfmSy8Y>, accessed on 26/05/2014.

Justice, the grand initiating body behind the fashion contest, whereas the Balassi Institutes were appointed to represent “Hungarian fashion” through showcasing the winners of the ‘Gombold Újra!’ contests in their venues around the world. Balassi Institutes have also gained an increasing role in the development and implementation of the new nation-brand strategy. In general the group of responsibilities in relation to the re-shaping of the nation-brand image got to be allocated to the Hungarian Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Justice and its various sub-institutions.

Perhaps the most visible representational layers of the ‘Cool Britannia’ were based on popular music, with the establishment of the bitterly unsuccessful National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield, the architectural design of which was assigned to the winner of a widely promoted architectural contest as part of the creative national imagery. The literal bankruptcy of the museum as a ‘cult’ place for pop-pilgrimage indexes how this means of populist nation-brand representation has lead to major expenses without meeting the actual expectations of its formation. Something very similar is happening in relation to the Hungarian initiation of ‘Gombold Újra!’ fashion contest, with its visibly increasing expenses on the spectacular showcasing of a glamorous fashion show, without the integration of fashion business professionals in the ‘support initiative’ failing to do what it claims to be standing for.

The above could lead to the following conclusion. Even though the British model undoubtedly served as an influence for the Hungarian nation-brand image project but, (secondly) the Hungarian case focused extensively on the representational features of the British attempt and failed to notice and consider the structural assessment of the institutional, industrial and economic groundings of the initiative. In other words the

seemingly spectacular success and fashionability of national patriotism rendered through BritPop and the fashionable re-dressing of celebrities in Union-Jacks got filtered in the discourse of the Hungarian national fashion contest as a source for the direct adaptation of culturally analogous aims, means and payoffs disregarding its aftermath and critical reception.

My thesis is to argue that the popular cultural representation of political ideologies as well as the political utilization of fashion or other popular cultural features is to fail in the particular social, political and cultural context of Hungary for several reasons, among which at this point I am particularly focusing on the use of the ‘rich Hungarian national folklore heritage’¹¹ to formulate the basis of the cool reiteration of the Hungarian national identity. If the British example is based on the 1960s retro in popular culture, why does the Hungarian initiating body assume that there is anything that could be rendered ‘cool’ from the Hungarian folklore heritage? Furthermore, why is it assumed to be a ‘shared heritage’, and who *are* sharing it?

2.2. National folk heritage in the service of yielding ‘national fashion’ through historical politics

To be able to formulate an argument on this matter it is worth having a look at the particular context of the desire to establish a new Hungarian national identity which could also serve as a base for a stable nation state and kin-state identity for Hungary. The notion of ‘kin-state identity’ refers to the identity position in which there is a large number of people who are not citizens of the country but on different ethnic, historical,

¹¹ According to the calls for tenders in 2011 and 2012 the aim is to “use a modern approach in processing the traditional Hungarian fashion- and folk-dress heritage, and lift it in the scope (‘the field of sight’) of the national and international fashion business and the inquiring audience”. See the full Hungarian text at: <http://www.pafi.hu/pafi/palyazat.nsf/ervdocidweburlap/270B2B6F35056DE3C125783E00434935>

familiar on other basis they still relate to it as a form of ‘external homeland.’¹² Thinking about the links between national identity, citizenship and constitutional identity Agnes Batory observes that the Central Eastern European countries, who had the possibility to establish their constitution only after gaining independence from the Soviet domination, tried to achieve multiple aims. They involved the following:

“There were demands to protect political rights and liberties, when the basis of citizenship, which would entitle individuals to exercise those rights was contested. There was an aspiration to catch up with contemporary Western democracies, but *also a drive to rediscover these nations’ pre-communist historical and cultural roots*. The notion of ‘returning to Europe’ brilliantly captured both of these aspirations, but left open the question of ‘which Europe’: the Europe of 1919, 1947 or 1989?” (Batori, 2010:34, italics mine)

Therefore the particular example of launching a national fashion contest in order to resurrect Hungarian creativity and re-position the rich Hungarian folklore heritage as a ‘cool’ core of inspiration could be read as the chimera of the joint desires of national and political ideologies. The idea is not only to rediscover the pre-communist roots of Hungary but also to establish a new Hungarian collective memory that incorporates a directional amnesia towards the state-socialist period by rendering it as a ‘dead-end’ or a ‘historical mistake’ after which the nation can turn back to its ‘initial, original and designated’ path. This aim is supplemented by the desire to ‘return to Europe’ and/or to *become* a fully valued European nation¹³ instead of a marginalized and ‘othered’ Central

12 Further on this Batory cites Brubaker, Rogers (1995) “National minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands in the new Europe”, *Daedalus* 124:2 pp. 107-133.

13 To illustrate the continuity of this idea it is enough to recall the very recent political posters of the governing party FIDESZ circulated in the EU elections campaign in the spring of 2014. The citylight version showed images of standing national flags, with a blue textbox (the political color of the EU) saying: “We send the word to Brussels:” (“Üzenjük Brüsszelnek:”) and underneath a large orange textbox (the political color of FIDESZ) saying: “Respect to Hungarians!” (“Tiszteletet a magyaroknak!”). Demanding the attitude of respect which is usually not granted through fighting for it but through living up to it clearly indexes the desire of a prompt access to the value of respectability on the ‘ontological’ basis of the acknowledgement of ‘Europeanness.’

European¹⁴ the bearer of a successor identity of the ‘Eastern bloc’ membership. Thus the national fashion contest with a compulsory folkloric base of inspiration is initiated to realize a twofold contradictory agenda: to render a ‘cool’ creative identity for a nation which is as ‘European’ as an EU presiding country can possibly be while re-establishing Hungarian patriotism and national identity as bearer of an official, homogeneous history, tradition, morals and ethics as guidelines for the state’s noble patriots. It is *this* very combination of ideologies that is fundamentally undermining the key aims of the national fashion contest, namely “the support of the development of Hungarian creative talent” which would require relative freedom of artistic choice and “the support the international business success of Hungarian fashion designers” which would require the encouragement of a resemblance to the international standards of the industry.¹⁵

This contradiction is enhanced by the representational features of the initiative while its overt success is undermined by directing all the efforts to the spectacular representations, sidelining the implementation of industrial reform strategies and professional business support altogether.

Having a quick look at the history of Hungarian fashion, pointing to the particular moments which have been evoked by the discursive framework of ‘Gombold Újra!’ initiative would reveal how the periods of the national or international fashion-success of the ‘Hungarian-style dress’ always referenced political standpoints of independence movements and/or desires of constructing a stable national identity. For lack of space I

14 On the dual framing of East-Central Europe as an inscription of otherness see Kuus, Merje (2004) “Europe’s eastern expansion and the reinscription of otherness in East-Central Europe”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 28:4, pp.472-489.

15 Both key aims are mentioned in the ‘about’ section of the contest homepage and referenced across its official press releases and interviews. See <http://gomboldujra.designterminal.hu/en/informacio.html#1> accessed on 05/05/2014.

will have to limit myself to note that, according to Hungarian historiography, the Hungarian presence in the Carpathian basin was haunted by the sense of an outsider-ness since the very beginning. The manifestations of this anxiety are recorded in the visual and object history of Hungarian dress¹⁶ the alternations of which vary between European court and/or bourgeois-styles (depending on the historical era) and Hungarian ‘traditional’ or ‘folkloric’ style. That is, the histories of fashion almost always write about the changes of styles in the middle and upper classes, while the dress of the lower classes is rendered as ‘traditional’. The dress varieties of the lower classes in Hungarian historical contexts are rendered meaningful and important in times when the political changes in Hungarian history involved periods of subordination and/or fracturing of the Hungarian territories. These periods necessarily involved a desire to return to the national roots, to become real Hungarians and show a clear separation from ‘foreign-spirited others.’¹⁷ The visual representations of the ‘traditional folklore heritage’ which needs to be resurrected and rendered fashionable in the ‘Gombold Újra!’ initiative are almost always referencing the folkloric elements of dress which evoke their 19th century states.

16 More on the history of Hungarian dress: F. Dozsa Katalin How the Hungarian National Costume Evolved. In: *The Imperial Style: Fashions of the Hapsburg Era*. New York, Rizzoli, 1980, 75-89. p., A polgárosodás kezdeteinek hatása a viseletben. Férfi és női divat 1778-1814 között. In: *Folia Historica* 12. (1984), 27-91. p., Letűnt idők, eltűnt divatok, 1867-1945. Budapest, Gondolat, 1989. An eighteenth-century Hungarian court dress with nineteenth century alterations: an example of historicism in the collection of Hungarian National Museum. In: István Éri (Ed.): *Conserving Textiles Studies in Honour of Ágnes Timár-Balázsy*. ICCROM, Rome, 2009. 52-60. p., Szilviczky Margit (1974) *Az öltözködés rövid története*, Corvina Kiadó, Budapest

¹⁷ See the above references.

2.3. The Hungarian Dress Movement of the 1930s

In relation to the ethnographical determination of the attributes of the ‘national costume’ or ‘folklore dress’ the Hungarian Lexicon of Ethnography (Further referenced as HLE)¹⁸ declares that it is formulated along carefully defined rules and regulations of the commonly accepted and approved varieties of dress, which were responsible for rendering indisputable differentiation of groups based on their social class, wealth, status, gender, occupation, ethnicity and religion which maintain their appearances for a ‘long time’. Based on these regulations, the aesthetic evaluation of certain items of clothing is based on the quality of the crafting, on the way they ‘fit’ the wearer and whether or not the garment fits coherently in the overall style of the subject.

Against this perception of the regulated and regulating nature of the ‘national costume’, the ‘Gombold Újra!’ contest which is set out to resurrect the Hungarian folk-dress heritage as its obligatory inspirational basis, seems to be a striking contradiction. The utilization of tradition-based attire as a means to create a Hungarian national fashion, through a dress code that should not change. The main requirements for becoming ‘fashionable’ in the contemporary context seem to rely on the ‘rules’ of transnational or global appeal to the mechanisms of the fashion industry, meeting the demands of differentiation, uniqueness, a non-developmental understanding of change (which happens for the sake of change), the aesthetic incorporation of short-cycled values coming from all areas of culture, society and the everyday life together with the retro and

¹⁸ See the chapter on Folklore dress at <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/4-22.html> accessed on 02/02/2014.

historicizing use of former styles, all in the sake of marketability and the maintenance of a stable and highly credited ‘cool and fashionable’ brand image.¹⁹ But what happens if the change-for-the-sake-of-change based fashion, which renders and uses up all values as disposable and exchangeable is supplemented by an idea of dress which is formulated along the strict rules of considerable timelessness, the maintenance of commonly acknowledged and obeyed social rules and the praise of a noble national identity?

In the history of Hungarian dress there are particular examples in which the bourgeois and upper-class fashion of wearing Hungarian-style dresses reflected the very direct political stances of cultural protectionism, autonomy movements, irredentism, or even the expression of a ‘National Grief’. This symbolic act of public mourning over the “losses of the nation” was expressed by an obligation of ‘modesty’, wearing the so called ‘Hungarian mourning dress’ as the official attire of Hungarian diplomacy, and the public dress of Hungarian patriotic noblewomen. There are two periods, remembered as the ‘great National Grief’: the national tragedy of the defeat of the war for Independence from the Habsburg Monarchy in 1848 and the equally tragic loss of 71 percent of the territories of Hungary and 64 percent of its population due to the Trianon Treaty, closing WWI (Gyáni, 2012:103). It is this latter period of a ‘National Grief’ which was followed by an increased institutional aim to ‘restore’ the fractured Hungarian identity by providing ‘true Hungarian dress for Hungarians.’ The ‘Horthy era’ (1922-1944) is of a special importance in the political context of the ‘Gombold Újra’ contest, because of its institutional support for the development of a ‘Hungarian fashion’ through the launching

19 For the more thorough contextualization of the theories on fashion see : Simmel ([1904] 1957), Veblen ([1908] 1912), Barthes ([1967]1990), Svendsen (2006), McRobbie (2009), Entwistle (2000), Tseñlon (2010), Klaniczay (1982).

of fashion design contest. The ‘national mourning’ after the 1920 peace treaty of Trianon was followed by several institutional aims to revive the fractured Hungarian industrial life and also to provide a basis for retrieving a patriotic national identity both along diverse cultural representations and the sites of the everyday life (Szatmáry, 2012: 144). One instrument of this aim was the attempt to restore the textile industry which had suffered from a very extensive loss after the reduction of Hungarian territories, being capable to meet only 10% of the raw material needs of the inland clothing industry (Szatmáry, 2012:145). This attempt was supplemented with the ideological desire to establish a Hungarian patriotic national identity for the independent Hungarian Kingdom ruled, ironically, by Regent Miklós Horthy. The extensive public and institutional movement of establishing a ‘Hungarian style fashion’ through the launching of fashion design contests reached a stage in the early 1930s when the secretary of the Ministry of Interior Ferenc Ferenczy has officially launched a design competition in 1933 together with the Association of Social Organizations (Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége), aiming to provide “a style of dress full of life and steeped in the Hungarian spirit, catering to the needs of today, leaving scope for individual taste, on a par with contemporary international dress and that remains in step with the times” (Szatmári, 2012:178). Following Katalin F. Dózsa:

“According to Ferenczy’s recollections, the timing was no accident, but a desire to highlight Hungarian values as a protest against Hitler’s accession to power and the rise of German influence. In 1934, Ferenczy founded the National Committee of the Hungarian Dress Movement (Magyaros Öltözködési Mozgalom Országos Bizottsága), which announced competitions annually until 1938” (F. Dózsa, 1989:335).

The aims of this movement were exactly the same as the ones of the contemporary fashion initiative ‘Gombold Újra!’, namely to produce Hungarian-style dresses which

would also appeal to the contemporary fashion trends, and along their growing popularity the Hungarian clothing industry would flourish and be revitalized.²⁰

Although the cultural context and the ideological framing of the Hungarian Dress Movement in the 1930s involved the distancing from the rise of the German influence in Hungary, there was a sensible shift in their fashion after 1938, when the increasing German-friendly politics and Anti-Semitism expropriated the Hungarian-style dress as an expression of far-right radical nationalism, reaching its peak in 1944. The ideological appropriation of fashion at the time was due to the fundamental ideological loadedness of the ‘Hungarian-style dress’ which foregrounded its primary symbolic meaning as a national attire, in order to yield a clear separation from the ‘others’ based on the costume-based expression of a national identity. Because the ideological formation of this kind of fashion is based on ethnic discrimination and national protectionism, the changes in the directions of hatred through increasing Anti-Semitism, resulted in the embrace of the very same Germans, which was demonstrated through wearing ‘Hungarian style fashion’ as the fashion of the new nationalist and Nazi-friendly Hungary.²¹ Although it was never explicitly and publicly referenced in the official press releases by the initiating bodies of the ‘Gombold Újra’ contest, the ideological investment of its rhetoric clearly marks out this particular example as its antecedent. However, the ‘other’ in the reinvention of the ‘national dress’ now seems to be ironically the “European” other who should be attracted to this trend in fashion.

²⁰ See the analogy with the 2011 and 2012 calls for tenders in Chapter 3.2.

²¹ One of the most revealing examples of this shift in the ideology of Hungarian style dress and its appropriation by the sympathizers of the Nazi Arrow Cross Party is the fashion-icon status of the famous and openly Arrow Cross Party friendly actress Zita Szeleczky, whose wardrobe and fashion choices were regularly featured in ladies periodicals, in 1944 and 1945.

To sum up the above, the ideological discourse of the ‘Gombold Újra!’ competition is formulated along the intersections of several, often contradictory ideologies, which entail the re-branding of a nation-state identity by utilizing the performative values of a design-based cultural communication, rendering a new Hungarian national identity which incorporates a ‘return to Europe’. This return is understood as the re-establishment of an ideal historical nation state identity, which builds on the ways of representing patriotic feelings, which have been developed in the historical periods when Hungarian patriotism equaled the desires of independence, and/or irredentism, yielded through the abjection of ‘others’. It is this fuzzy and contradictory ideological mixture that is supposed to work as a representational basis for the new and stable patriotic Hungarian national identity. By choosing the means of a fashion spectacle to expose this ideological desire in a glamorous environment reveals the gendered position of fashion in the great project of renewing Hungarianness as an identity, rendering it as a superficial (and necessarily feminine) masquerade, the only ‘duty’ and ‘utility’ of which is to ornament the (feminine) embodiment of patriotic ideologies.

2.4. National Protectionism and the transnational fashion industry

Although the primary self-definition of ‘Gombold Újra!’ entails a reference to its mission ‘to draw attention to the successes of Hungarian fashion design and to the economic and creative potentials of the industry,’²² it has failed to live up to this statement so far,²³

²² <https://hu-hu.facebook.com/notes/gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/sajt%C3%B3k%C3%B6zlem%C3%A9ny-gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/150996368301324> accessed on 23/02/2014.

²³ At this point I have to index that the most recent, 2014 initiation of the fashion contest involved several changes which were directed to the improvement of the supportive implementations of the project

producing fashion spectacles in 2011 and 2012 that lacked any commitment to incorporate the contest in the cycles of the transnational fashion industry and fashion business. There are some international examples available in the context of establishing a ‘national fashion’ as a means of performing a renewed set of values to participate in the reconfiguration of the national identity. So the idea of the Hungarian Government could have similar examples, as I shall demonstrate these. Despite of their clearly visible ideological stances incorporated the industrial and business-related aims, they managed to forge connections with the transnational fashion industry, because they understand ‘fashion’ primarily as a business which incorporates intersections of design, craftsmanship, industry, business and consumerism.

Although this thesis does not allow the extensive presentation of the criticism directed to the notion of the ‘global fashion industry’ it is nevertheless important to state that the intersections of nation, gender and fashion together with politics, citizenship and the consistently conflicting systems, which yield the engendered power relations of fashion in terms of its politics of the cultural and the way the division of labor is distributed along the systems of its design (‘fashion authorship’) and production, performing the overall discourse of the ‘transnational’ fashion industry. It is worth to note that the notion of ‘global’ fashion industry has evoked extensive criticism, mostly in non-Western and post-socialist discourses arguing, that the geopolitical division of labor between fashion production and fashion-ownership (i.e. design, authorship and the nationality-related connotations of the brand image) further increases the gendered gap in terms of fashion-

periods, involving the pre-selection and preparation times as well as the continuing support of the winner. Unfortunately the thorough examination of the true values and efficiency of the supporting implementations will have to wait until after this particular contest period, they nevertheless flash some hope for improvement.

accessibility between the producing and owning regions of the globe. Therefore the word ‘global’ in this context does not refer to an overall availability of fashion, but to the intensification of the sharp demarcations between the multiple level participants of the fashion industry. In this context of fashion as a ‘global’ (!) economic factor, nationality and political ideologies play a crucial role. Simona Segre Reinach points to the correspondence between China and Italy for the sake of establishing an identity for China, which would incorporate fashion authorship as well, thus trying to liberate its national identity from the deterministic stereotype that renders China as a nation with capacities only for the (mostly poor-quality) production and consumption of fashion. Reinach delineates the context in which the first emerging Chinese fashion designers had to develop their position in the challenging space occupied by the negative stereotypes of the low-value production, the orientalist views on ‘authentic Chineseness’ and the stylistic superiority of everything ‘European’ Particularly ‘Italian’ (Reinach, 2009). Located in a geopolitical context similar to Hungary, the excellent analysis of Hsiao-hung Chang on the role of the fake-logo culture in East-Asia reveals how the production and consumption market of the fake-branded fashion items contributes to the self-reproductive economic logic of the ‘fake-logo’ industry which is built on a ‘cultural-logic’ of a desired mimesis of a ‘cool’ national self-identification (Chang, 2004). This particular process of a desired national self-identification through fashion is explained along a very clear Taiwanese example of fashion consumption dissecting the way it yields a sense of belonging through fashion consumption, by showing how the consumption of one particular fashion brand points not only to the Euro-American brand-

fetishism of East-Asia but also to its already shifted and reworked Japanese adaptation (Chang, 2004:227).

A regionally closer example of the examination of the role of fashion in rendering a renewed national identity is the creation of national fashion brands in contemporary Bulgaria, where the aim to enhance the reputation of the post-socialist nation (similarly to that of the Chinese example) is combined with the performative ways of economic value production. While delivering his case study, Ulrich Ermann operates with the understanding of economic as a cultural formation (Thrift, 2000:689) to focus on the performativity of such an economic model in terms of value production in post-socialist societies. As he argues:

(...) the implementation of a consumer orientated and sign-orientated economy is a fundamental effect of the neoliberal shift of post-socialist economies. This also implies an implementation of new meanings of value in everyday economic routines of producers, marketers and consumers. They are driven by a combination of various tendencies. First, individuals reach to new neoliberal conditions in the sense of 'domesticating neoliberalism' in order to gain benefits or just sustain their economic well-being. Second, subjects imitate and adapt 'modern', 'Western' values and lifestyles which are recognized as a necessity for pursuing the 'good life'. Third the formation of the neoliberal identity is associated with the dissociation from the socialist subject or the reinterpretation of socialist subjectivities (Ermann, 2013: 1348).

This example is important in relation to the Hungarian case since it demonstrates that the restructuring of the system(s) of consumption in post-socialist environments plays a formative role in the alteration of the identity of the subjects within that environment through the re-shaping of their consumption based value-producing mechanisms.

The image of the nation is crucial in this Bulgarian context as well, even though Ermann makes it clear that the national fashion brands in his example are being developed primarily for and relating to the Bulgarian and international fashion market, which means

that they are particularly first and foremost the products of a westernized approach to fashion-business rendering their values so as to attract the consumers. Their methods at times even involve the hiding of the Bulgarian nationality of the fashion brand, because it is seen by prospective consumers as backward or non-fashionable (Ermann, 2013:1351).

The above examples indicate that the contemporary attempts to influence the formation of national identities through attempts of developing something like a ‘national fashion’ tend to evolve from a context based on a primary desire of identification with the shared values and economies of the transnational fashion industry. They have been developed to alternate the particular national identities forged in relation to their presence *within this* transnational discourse of fashion. Yet, the first two years of the fashion initiative of the ‘Gombold Újra!’ competition were not invested in ‘fitting in’ this discourse. Mostly due to its essentially ideological and political footings this enterprise was primarily involved in the creation of a glamorous spectacle for the representation of a new identity politics for the errand subjects, who were left without a basis for a national pride. But because the environment of this spectacle was provided by the scenery of a fashion design campaign, the theatricality of the two fashion shows was meant to stand for the entire initiative. In other words, as I will point to it further on, the role of the fashion shows was to embody and replace the entire initiative of ‘Gombold Újra!’ which turned out not just to fail in the supportive development of an important part of the Hungarian creative industry, but also lead to the nationality based discrimination of a few existing and internationally successful Hungarian fashion brands, who while pursuing their careers in the international centers of the industry have experienced turn downs because of their

nationality and the nations politics.²⁴ This is particularly interesting because it shows how far the discourse of fashion is from a global openness and permeability, and how the nationality based divisions of labor within its context are engendered by its ‘capitals’. This symptom also reveals that the discursive base of the Hungarian fashion context that was focused on the ‘resurrection’, ‘re-establishment’ and ‘bringing Hungarian creativity into fashion again’ rendered its position as the founding supporter and management body of and institutionalized Hungarian fashion-proper. Whereas the existing contemporary fashion brands which have experienced growing success on particular markets of the transnational fashion industry, have served as reference points for the official argumentation of the marketability of Hungarian creative talent, these brands were the ones who kept a distance from ‘Gombold Újra!’ particularly in its first year, marking the initiative too political and expressing concerns about its harmful effects on their brand images.

However, starting from the second year of the initiative, most of these established Hungarian brands have showcased their off-competition fashion-shows presenting their latest collections after all, with the continuing absence of the two fashion brands which have provided the most extensive international sales. These were the first two brands which have received the first ever venture capital investments in Hungary later in 2013.²⁵ Although their earlier international successes in the fashion industry were politically and

²⁴ Due to the protection of these fashion business enterprises I will not explain their cases in detail at this point. There are three such cases, which I was informed about but all of them came as confidential information from the designers. One of the cases concerned a rejection of orders from a textile manufacturer, the other a rejection from a showroom (both claiming that ‘at this moment, due to the politics of the country it would give a bad name to the companies if they would do business with Hungarians’), while in the third case a brand decided to relocate its headquarters to an established fashion center and proceed with identifying as a brand from that location.

²⁵ See the reference from the ‘Gombold Újra’ Facebook page about the investment in the brand USE Unused: <https://www.facebook.com/gomboldujra/posts/518344451566512>, accessed on 28/05/2014.

institutionally independent, they have been praised on the social media site of the ‘Gombold Újra!’ initiative as proofs for the success of the Hungarian fashion industry in which ‘Gombold Újra!’ has a significant role. This step of the other established fashion brands, choosing to participate in the show indicates however, that even though the political refrains of the initiative were grounds for concern regarding the evaluation of the established Hungarian fashion brands (who had all the reasons to be worried about this as I have indexed it above), nevertheless, the professional event management, organization and national media representation of these grand scale fashion shows was so convincing that the invited brands had to make a reasonable decision to enhance their national visibility by accepting the invitation to present their collections.²⁶

²⁶ Among the 2012 year off-competition presenters nearly all of the contemporary established ‘young’ Hungarian fashion brands did participate. These were the following: KEPP Showroom, Dori Tomcsanyi, Dora Abodi, Dora Mojzes, Artista, Dora Konsanszky, Kata Szegedi, Dani Benus, Sandor Lakatos.

3. The Hungarian national Fashion contest ‘Gombold Újra! Divat a Magyar’

After introducing the key aspects of how the intersecting ideologies of nationalism, gender and fashion shape the political processes in which the utilization of fashion becomes a tool of both the construction and the representation of a national identity, I will now turn to the analysis of the Hungarian case of the national fashion contest, which was first initiated in 2011 and has arrived through several systemic changes and a fairly consistent ideological background to its fourth year in 2014.²⁷ Since the consistent ideological background of the compulsory inspiration from the ‘traditional folk heritage’ remained unchanged in the years of the contest, but there were however some noteworthy attempts to improve the overall process of the contests for the sake of ‘closing up’ to ‘international values’ I will focus this particular textual and visual analysis on the first two years of the contest, on the periods in which it was a Hungarian national contest before turning ‘regional’ with the Visegrad Countries.

The data of my analysis consist of the official press releases and image videos of the first two years of the contest series together with the calls for tenders, the textual and visual data of the contests social media channels and their Hungarian press-reception. The rhetorical examination of the official website, the calls for tenders and the key messages of the official press releases in 2011 and 2012, together with the visual analysis of the annual image videos will delineate the key aspects of the ideological framework which is

²⁷ Since the 2014 contest has just reached the first deadline of applications in the time of my writing this paper, I will have to rely on the data of the past three years, referencing the existing data of this year in addition to that.

mobilized in the service of stressing the importance of the initiation and conduct of this fashion contest as a prominent cultural event with high national and international significance, serving to improve the image of Hungary in an interlinked international cultural and political context and to upgrade the dignity of the Hungarian national identity.

The official website of the competition is being annually renewed and there are no archives available for the comparative analysis of each years' self-identifications. Therefore the currently available disclaimer of the 2014 competition is meant to represent a stability and continuity in the set of values and key aims of Central European Fashion Days and/or Gombold Újra. These are collected in the following set of "beliefs":

"We believe in: 1. The international standing of the region's creative intellectual values. 2. The potential of fashion as a tool for using the region's rich culture and traditions as a source of inspiration in a modern context. 3. The growth of the region's economic and intellectual potential by contributing to young designers' entry to the market. 4. Cooperation and creation of a community that ensures more effective communication and relationships with the international market. 5. Budapest's ability to represent the region's talented and creative designers" (Who We Are, 2014).²⁸

The chosen rhetoric of this list of value statements delineates the primary discursive matrix, in which the initiating governmental institution locates its understanding of a 'national fashion.' According to this logic fashion is primarily understood to be a tool of cultural value transmission, which is therefore entitled to and *able* to transmit a carefully chosen set of national values rooted in the shared context of national heritage. Thus the national fashion not only seems transparent from the perspectives of both shared traditional values (which it makes visible) and contemporary transnational fashion (by meeting its standards of stylishness and "cool") but the ideological establishment of such

²⁸ Read the complete text at <http://gomboldujra.designterminal.hu/en/informacio.html#1> accessed on 05/05/2014.

a national fashion also becomes a serviceable tool of the retroactive re-composition and re-structuring of the ideological value system of the national historical knowledge.

As already shown in previous chapters with both historical and contemporary examples, this aim of reconfiguring the national identity through the utilization of fashion builds on the assumption that, since the attitudes to fashion undoubtedly contribute to individual identity formation on the level of everyday adorning practices and it is also a very important indicator and catalyzer of group belonging, the desire to express a national belonging also has to have a notable part within the fashion choices of the individual.

The discourse of this particular Hungarian model of inventing a ‘national fashion’ seems to incorporate rhetorical and ideological elements from the previously mentioned types of political utilization of fashion, which produces a combined ideology of establishing a nation state ideology by inventing an image to traditional Hungarianness against a ‘superficial cosmopolitanism’ a cool image to Hungary as the creative and innovative center of Central Eastern Europe, and a national protectionist image of Hungary priding the government for the support and improvement of Hungary’s creative industries that are “the engines of Hungary.”

The above value statement stresses the *existence* and *worth* of an accessible and joined regional cultural heritage the importance and the value of which has to be channeled towards an established ‘international’ context by the help of fashion as a *device* of this value transmission. Juxtaposing the authority of an already existing “international market” unaware of existing marketable treasures, and the “growth of the region’s economic and intellectual production” which is situated here as a *new* phenomenon, suggests the existence of a linear model of the cultural and economic development of

post-industrial nation-states, that is detectable and could be accessible by an investment in the creative industries. The “region” has reached this stage of development which now needs to be promoted from one side and be approvingly embraced by the other. Stressing the ‘ability’ of the capital of Hungary to take the responsibility of becoming a regional ‘fashion capital’ produces a dichotomous self-identification which claims to engage Budapest in the transnational or global discourse of fashion *by* stressing its individuality, peripheral stance and devotion to using fashion as a tool for channeling ideologies of nation-state identity.

3.1. Calls for tenders – press releases

The contest was initiated as a key cultural event of the year of the Hungarian EU Presidency in 2011 and had been expansively re-branded to Central European Fashion Days in 2013 in the year of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Four Group. 2014 is the fourth year of the event series and fashion design contest and the first in which the young fashion designers coming from all Visegrad countries are allowed to enter the competition. The compulsory basis of inspiration in all four years of the design competition-series was the processing and adaptation of a “national heritage”, which was expanded to “the heritage of the region” in 2013. According to the opening speech of the 2011 event given by the spokesperson of the government Anna Nagy, the reasoning behind this thematic focus was “to draw attention to the successes of Hungarian fashion design and to the economic and creative potentials of the industry” and also to “show the world the less familiar face of the creative Hungary.”²⁹

29(“A különleges pályázattal a magyar divattervezés sikereire, az iparágban rejlő gazdasági és kreatív lehetőségekre kívánják felhívni a figyelmet. (...) A rendezvény része a magyar soros EU elnökség tiszteletére rendezett kulturális programoknak, ahol Magyarország egy kevésbé ismert, kreatív arcát tudja megmutatni az

The organizing body consisted of Design Terminal, the strategic backup institution of the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Justice (from here on by KIM) and Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, while the integrated communication of the events, as part of the communications tender of the Hungarian EU Presidency in 2011 was carried out by the winning consortium of ACG Advance Communication Group and Hamu és Gyémánt Group.³⁰

There has been a noticeable increase in the institutional involvement in the support of the contemporary Hungarian design industry from the year of the Hungarian EU presidency in 2011 the preparation of which started right after the 2010 governmental elections with the setting up of a Nation Brand Committee³¹ under the Office of the Minister of State for Public Diplomacy and Relations at KIM.³² Although the aim behind the utilization of design-communication for governmental communication was interpreted by the government spokesperson as a handy and straightforward tool for the “solution oriented approach of problems”, the increasing shift from public diplomacy into design oriented public relations evoked serious criticism in Hungarian media arguing that the extensive

érdeklődőknek.”) Extracted from the official press release of the awarding ceremony in 2011. <https://hu-hu.facebook.com/notes/gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/sajt%C3%B3k%C3%B6zlem%C3%A9ny-gombold-%C3%BAjra-divat-a-magyar/150996368301324> accessed on 23/02/2014.

30 See the reference under Works at <http://www.acg.hu/> and at Hamu és Gyémánt <http://hgmedia.hu/kozpenzek/magyarorszag-soros-eu-elnoksegenek-btl-kommunikacios-feladatai/>, accessed on 13/04/2014.

31 For the membership of the Committee see <http://www.kormany.hu/download/a/f1/00000/Az%20Orsz%C3%A1ggy%C5%B1l%C3%A9si%20Tan%C3%A1cs%20%C3%B6sszet%C3%A9tele.pdf> accessed on 13/04/2014.

32 For the key points of the Nation Brand Representation see <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kozigazgatasi-es-igazsagugyi-miniszterium/tarsadalmi-kapcsolatokert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/felelossegi-teruletek/orszagmarka> accessed on 13/04/2014.

interstate nation-brand-image campaign drives the attention away from more serious political issues.³³

Although it was not listed in the primary context of the initiating bodies the Balassi Institute, the foreign cultural institute of Hungary, similarly to the Design Terminal a background institution of KIM also plays a crucial role in the initiative. It has a function in the international representation of the winners on exhibitions and fashion shows which were organized in the buildings of Balassi Institute around the world. Their role provides a very important account on the division of labor between the political institutions and organizing bodies of the initiative, exposing its embeddedness in the ideological framework of the renewed Hungarian cultural politics. The fact that the Balassi Institutes and their network provided the only basis for the highly propagated ‘international representation’ of the winning pieces clearly demonstrates how the absence of a professional business-based network within the transnational fashion industry, and the disadvantages to go with this lack – namely the lack of a connection-based environment within the professional enterprise of the ‘global’(!) industry – is being visibly replaced with the buildings of the Hungarian Cultural Institution which conducts its affairs mostly in the domains of cultural and political diplomacy. And that is very far from the everyday businesses of the fashion industry.

Reading the calls for tenders together with the official press releases of the initiative could point to certain aspects of the different rhetoric directed to different audiences. The calls for tenders were particularly directed to fashion design students and young professionals of the design industry. Despite of the structural differences in the two year’s

33 See among others “Adnak a Látszatra” in HVG, 2011/17

tenders³⁴ the textual composition of the ‘key aim’ sections of the calls remained fairly consistent, asking the competitors to “use a modern approach in processing the traditional Hungarian fashion- and folk-dress heritage, and lift it in the scope (‘the field of sight’) of the national and international fashion business and the inquiring audience”.³⁵ The 2011 tender is adding an extra assignment to the ‘processing’ and ‘lifting in scope’, namely the ‘multi-perspective visual processing’³⁶. A year later this limb has nevertheless been removed from the end of the sentence in the Contemporary fashion design-tender (further referenced as 2012a) to add the argumentative supplement “so as to create examples by the results to their [the elements of the traditional Hungarian folkloric heritage] application and use on contemporary dress.”³⁷ The second tender of 2012 entitled ‘Design and Tradition’ (further referenced as 2012b) however only stresses the aim to encourage co-working with traditional craftspeople and contemporary fashion designers for the sake of creating dresses: “that join together traditional pattern culture, textures and technologies with contemporary design.”³⁸ Each set of targets seems to incorporate a

³⁴These structural differences involved the division of calls into two separate competition blocks in the 2012 contest, where the tender was both composed for (1) a design of a contemporary collection and (2) the joint work of established fashion designers and the contestants by encouraging the latter to ornament the already pre-designed dresses by using traditional folkloric hand-crafting techniques. See all (1+2) calls for tenders at <http://www.pafi.hu/pafi/palyazatok/ervdocidweburlap/270B2B6F35056DE3C125783E00434935>, Accessed on 21/02/2014, and <http://palyazatok.org/gombold-ujra-divat-a-magyar-2-0-kortars-oltozekkollekcio-tervezesi-palyazat-2012/>, accessed on 28/02/2014, and <http://www.tmamk.hu/download/Gombold2.pdf>, accessed on 28/02/2014.

³⁵„A pályázat célja a tradicionális magyar öltözkész- és divattörténeti értékek és hagyományok modern szemléletű feldolgozása, beemelése a hazai és nemzetközi divatszakma és érdeklődő közönség látóterébe, továbbá ennek többoldalú vizuális művészeti feldolgozása.”
<http://www.pafi.hu/pafi/palyazatok/ervdocidweburlap/270B2B6F35056DE3C125783E00434935>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷<http://palyazatok.org/gombold-ujra-divat-a-magyar-2-0-kortars-oltozekkollekcio-tervezesi-palyazat-2012/>,

³⁸„A pályázat célja olyan ruhadarabok/kiegészítők megalkotása, amelyek ötvözik a tradicionális mintakultúrát, technológiákat és anyaghasználatot a modern formaalakítással.” <http://www.tmamk.hu/download/Gombold2.pdf>, accessed on 28/02/2014.

‘collective understanding’ of what the adjectives ‘traditional’ or the compound ‘national folklore heritage’ denotes. Involving the role of the co-operation with ‘traditional’ craftsmen, and the role of ornaments, patterns and textures together with skilled craftsmen, this ‘collective understanding’ refers to the earlier accredited institutionalized set of knowledge which got substantiated along the epistemological and taxonomical rules of the early 20th century disciplinization of Hungarian Ethnography, with its research-roots going back to the early 19th century. In other words the ‘traditional’ ways of the Hungarian ornamenting and crafting techniques seem to stand for the institutionalized understanding of the golden age of ‘Hungarianness’ which was first academically described one hundred years ago as something to recollect the ‘eternal’ practices, routines oral and object history of Hungarian peasantry, who as a social class would stand for the representation of the authentic and timeless ‘Hungarianness’. In this respect it came as no surprise that the incorporated folkloric references which were re-contextualized by the actual outcomes, i.e. the competing designer pieces have indexed this period of the history of Hungarian dress, even though they could just as well have gone back to the old dresses of the early nomadic Hungarian-settlers in the Carpathian basin around the first century AD as well as retrieving inspirations from the 300 years tradition of wearing caftans, or the 15-16th century piece of clothing the silk mantle called *turca* which was referenced as ‘typically Hungarian’ in non-Hungarian written sources (F. Dózsa, 2012: 26).

The essentializing oversimplification of what is meant under ‘traditional’ and ‘national heritage’ is furthered by the minimal attribution to the description of the so called ‘contemporary design’ which should have been achieved by the employment of a

‘modern approach’. By employing the ‘traditional – modern’ dichotomy, the discourse of the transnational fashion industry was not at all addressed. The phrasing of the calls for tenders is particularly important as it should contain all information what the future contestants – who also equate with the future of Hungarian fashion design – need in order to develop their creative work which would meet the expectations of the assigned ‘national and international fashion business and the inquiring audience’. Therefore – especially to the development of works which would attract the so called ‘international fashion business’ the above dichotomy is not really a helpful means of setting out the inspirational context, since it references the cluelessness of the initiating body in terms of its targets.

In the first two years of the contest series there was an important shift in the amount of releases. Generally it is worth to note that there was a drastic decrease in the amount of press releases initiated in the second year of 2012 compared to that of the first. In both periods the KIM initiated the press releases, but while in 2011 there was a total of 16 press releases, this amount was reduced to only 3 Ministry initiated press releases throughout the campaign period³⁹. This could be due to the already established-ness of the media message and the assumed ‘brand-awareness’. Another reason could be that in the second year, most of the media presence throughout the campaign period was maintained through media partnerships with glossy magazines and fashion-related blogs. The shift between the one directional political-communicational methodology of the media visibility strategy to its almost entire replacement by media partnerships on the

³⁹In 2011 this period was a yearlong, due to its overlap with the EU Presidency while in the second year Ministry initiated press releases were presented only in May, the month of the closing event. There were overlaps between the two campaign periods, since the November and December releases of 2011 were already dedicated to the pre-campaign period of the 2012 competition.

glossy and fashion media market reads as an attempt to move the entire visibility of the initiative a bit away from its stance in cultural politics and provide it with a more glossy ‘fashionable appeal’ which would render the ‘fashionability’ of the event both in its ‘fashion business’ and ‘fashion as something for girls’ understanding. This shift is noticeable in the ways in which the messages are formulated, indicating dissimilar approach to the targeted audiences. The general rhetoric and key messages of the 2011 press releases could be summed up by citing a part from the 23rd March release, which reports on the second round of the selection processes:

“The aim of the initiators of ‘Gombold Újra! Divat a Magyar!’ fashion design contest is to motivate the creative industry and to revive the Hungarian fashion-tradition. The task of the contestants is to *demonstrate*: The Hungarian dress tradition and contemporary fashion trends *are reconcilable*. The tender provides an opportunity for showcasing the work of some of the most outstandingly talented young Hungarian fashion designers, and for the promotion of stylish everyday-fashion” (*italics mine*).⁴⁰

This quote underlines the key contradictions which formulate the basis of the targeted goals of the contest along the intersecting ideologies of fashion, nationalism, cultural politics and their gendered divisions of labor. As the quote suggests there is an expressed and publicly acknowledged *need* to motivate the creative industry which is thus depending on this motivation. By not even mentioning how the almost one decade long, increasing success of the existing young Hungarian fashion industry has provided such an extensive and positive appreciation on the transnational fashion market, that the government wants to participate in this success story by providing all the professional help that is needed for these companies to grow – the contextual framing of press release

⁴⁰„A „Gombold újra! Divat a magyar” pályázattal a szervezők célja a kreatív gazdaság ösztönzése és a magyar divathagyomány megújítása. A tervezők feladata, hogy bebizonyítsák: a magyar öltözködési tradíciók és a kortárs divattrendek összeegyeztethetők. A pályázat lehetőséget biztosít a kiemelkedő tehetségű, fiatal magyar divattervezők munkájának bemutatására, egyúttal az igényes mindennapi öltözködés népszerűsítésére is.” <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kozigazgatasi-es-igazsagugyi-miniszterium/tarsadalmi-kapcsolatokert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/divat-lett-a-magyar> accessed on 02/23/2014.

simply erases this reference, and starts a new narrative in which the Hungarian creative industry is ‘in need of motivation’.

The problem with this particular phrasing is not primarily that it sets out the task to demonstrate the reconcilability of “Hungarian dress tradition” and contemporary fashion trends. There were several periods in the 20th century of fashion, serving with examples for such a harmony. The problem is that the narrative suggests that it is this particular stylistic inspirational process and thematic fashion design is the only one eligible to serve as basis for the ‘new Hungarian fashion design’ and as the demonstration of the outstanding young Hungarian fashion talent. The political ideology embedded in this obligation to demonstrate the stylistic harmony of two ways of dressing which did not come up as a result of the transnational fashion trends, but whose reconciliation would mean a sort of an injection, and implementation of a ‘strongly recommended’ style to the fashion industry – this political ideology is on the one hand mislead by the trendy retro-revival styles of the very influencing, popular cultural patriot-campaign, the ‘Cool Britannia.’ On the other hand it is being manipulated by the ideological motivations of 21st century East Central European historical politics assuming that the fashionable re-iteration of a particular visual representation of a national imagery would directly serve as a tool for the enhancement of national pride among Hungarians (which they must necessarily be in lack of – according to this logic). Thirdly it erases the earlier success of the existing contemporary Hungarian fashion talents, whose very success and expanding popular cultural influence provided the motivation for investing in such a campaign.

As I have indexed earlier, the media presence of the 2012 event was predominantly secured by media partnerships in the so called ‘glossy, women’s and fashion media.’

These appearances mostly consisted about the interviewing of the members of the jury about the initiative, quizzes and other reader-participation games to win tickets for the final show, press coverages, backstage reports and bazaar-page stylings which have also promoted the initiative as the grand event of Hungarian fashion design with extremely talented backstage personnel. One of the interesting features of these reports and coverages was their extensive visual focus and primary online presence. Particularly focused on the preparations, during-the-event and post-event representations, they were creating an image of the “Gombold Újra 2.0” as a major fashion show with professional show directorship and spectacular stage design. This focus and ‘staging’ of the representation stood in for rendering its image as ‘the most important fashion event in the country,’ whereas the supplementary means of media presence (the games, quizzes, bazaar page stylings, designer introduction pages in glossy magazines etc.) served as tools for the popularization of the idea of a (new) Hungarian fashion in the sense of fashion as ‘something for girls’. Nevertheless this latter framework should have been responsible in rendering a ‘cool’ status to the wearing of the ‘new Hungarian style fashion’, but this message did not come up among the praises of the backstage reports. In other words, the acknowledgements of the professional skills and the technical excellence of the event itself was not supplemented with a layer of communication which would have secured the position of this new Hungarian style within the ‘global’ (!) fashion discourse that is the base of the representational materials of the ‘fashion media.’ The semiology of the images did not provide examples for wear-ability, or applicability to the fashionable wardrobes of cool and trendy Hungarians, but they have showcased the

winning items in exceptional environments, worn by Hungarian star-models in one-model-centered editorials.⁴¹

The popular cultural representation of fashion as a means for the ‘masquerade of femininity’ (Rivière, 1929) in Western feminist discourse is understood to render a sense of fashionability in its post-feminist understanding, which would represent independent, empowered heterosexual feminine subjects in a world in which feminism is some pointless anachronism since their agendas have been resolved. I will not go in depth in the definition of post-feminism and its interrogations from a feminist perspective, mostly because of my positionality as a researcher based in a Central Eastern European context. I must take into consideration the specific social and historical developments, which have rendered a very different sense of ‘feminism’, ‘femininity’ and along with that provided a very different stance on developing an attitude towards, whatever feminism in this context might mean. The argumentative formation of these concepts should be developed from a critical perspective, interrogating its relationship to the formerly ‘tagged’ positionalities like Western, non-Western, post-colonial, post-social, post-feminist, post-social anti-feminist, Western post-feminist, as well as the critical stances of women of color and the theoretical inquiries raised along the lines of intersectionality. At this point the inherent limitations of this thesis do not allow me to extend my in-depth theoretical inquiry in relation to the applicability of the Western critique of post-feminism to this particular popular cultural terrain, but in relation to the prevailing gender regimes in

⁴¹The first years winning collection pieces were worn by the acclaimed Hungarian model Enikő Mihalik on the pages of Glamour magazine, while in 2012 Marie Claire has made a fashion editorial with the winning collection. The model was Rêka Ebergényi and it was shot by Zoltán Tombor, both of them acknowledged professionals in the transnational fashion industry. The visual communications campaign in the same year of 2012 included a giant partition-wall painting on a five story building in central Budapest, depicting the former model Gabriella Lukács, wearing the winner piece. Lukács was also the coordinator of models at the 2012 fashion-show.

contemporary Hungary I will at this point accept and go along with the carefully developed argumentation of Beáta Hock, who in her analysis on gendered artistic positions and social voices in state socialist and post-socialist Hungary has developed a clear and straight forward argument on the Hungarian post-socialist female subjectivities (Hock, 2013). I will return to this issue in more detail later when discussing the embodiments of a ‘national fashion’ and its images of femininity.

Nevertheless I think that the forthcoming analysis of the image-video campaigns of the first two years of the initiative will point to some aspects of the ideological stances on fashion employed by the organizing body in order to render an ‘image’ to their concept of ‘resurrecting’ Hungarian creativity through fashion.

3.2. Image videos

Examining the television advertisements of the fashion contest I am particularly interested in the way these spots depict the image of fashion as a cultural phenomenon: what are their tools of depicting it and what kinds of messages do they deliver, how they speak to what kinds of audiences, and what kinds of responses do they aim to achieve? I would like to assess the gender regimes implicated by these videos, which shape the ideologies and politics of a particular understanding of fashion as a representative of national identity by a Hungarian governmental institution. The first two videos⁴² were produced in 2011 as the television ads in Hungarian public and commercial television channels⁴³, broadcasted nationwide, promoting the contest closing fashion show as a free

⁴²See the videos at the following links: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Z_P387mifU and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_mSalUjTIE , accessed on 12/04/2014.

⁴³ The ads were aired in all public television channels (m1, m2, Duna and the internationally broadcasted DunaWorld) and in the two market-leading commercial channels TV2 and RTL.

event open for the wide public.⁴⁴The television advertisement of 2012⁴⁵ was a single advertisement and the last promotion material produced in this genre. From 2013 the re-branded Central European Fashion Days only delivered video spots with online and social media presence.

The 2011 spots were the only coming in a pair of a ‘girl-ad’ and ‘boy-ad’. Both are 19 seconds long and they share some other features as well in as much as both scenes employ one actor who is situated at the center of different kinds of historicizing interiors. The filming of the scenes implicates the usage of an old movie camera filter⁴⁶ to achieve the visual effect of an early 20th century movie. As the camera zooms on each character both of them receive a rectangular colored portrait of themselves as a contemporary, stylish, beautiful and smiling young man and woman. The background of the ad-closing animation shows a textile cutting pattern with the following words floating in and voiced in an enthusiastic and dynamic manner: “We are bringing Hungarian creativity alive in 2011. Fashion Show on the 8th of May in the Museum of Fine Arts. Re-Button: Hungarian is Chic.” The ‘boy-ad’ presents an actor dressed in historicizing ‘huszár’ outfit, sitting in the center of an interior which is styled in the genre of a 19th century urban aristocratic study room. His contemporary styled colored portrait picture appears at 0:02 as the camera zooms in and the face performs a symbolic beatbox-kind of a performance referred to on Hungarian as ‘szájdoromb’, named after the a unique

⁴⁴Due to this public campaign a huge crowd of excited fashion enthusiasts gathered in front of the National Museum of Fine Arts unable to get in and they eventually had to watch the event from large screens outside in the pouring rain. <http://cotcot.hu/cikk/2011/05/10/ujragomboltak>

⁴⁵ See the video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BU54MJVpSo>, accessed on 08/05/2014.

⁴⁶ This is a special filter which is incorporated in all of the available motion design computer programs, and there are such filters also available as smart-phone applications. The filters come in different types according to the specific period of motion picture history which they aim to represent.

sounding traditional Hungarian rhythm instrument ‘doromb’ the sound of which is the key organizing element of the ads dub-based soundtrack. The color of the ad-closing animation is green, and the voice of the ad is male, while the ‘girl-ad’ uses a red closing animation, with a female voice and a string-dominated soundtrack.

The ‘girl-ad’ is situated in a historicizing interior which could equally resemble a traditional 19th or early 20th century rural Hungarian peasant kitchen or an urban upper-middle class kitchen of roughly the same period. The historical era and the social class is not specifically definable is because of a rural-peasant nostalgia present in early 20th century urban interior decoration, particularly in the quarters of the upper-middle class houses or apartments, which were considered to be the more intimate, “women’s quarters” such as the bedroom, the children’s room, the kitchen and the maid’s chamber.⁴⁷ This nostalgia inspired fashion arose in the late 19th century and achieved a peak in the 1930s as one of the many visible consequences of the Trianon Trauma. It was present throughout the Horthy era, when a sort of a revival of the national traditional folk heritage served as a tool to re-establish a lost and disintegrated national identity.⁴⁸

The other reason why it is hard to identify the symbolic timeframe and the social class aimed to be evoked by the ad is because the styling of the female character, situated at the center of the scene could both be recognized as a young rural-peasant maiden

47 There are not many publications available on the subject of Hungarian interior history, my knowledge here is based on conversations about the topic with historians and art historians Judit Szathmary, Katalin F. Dozsa and Ildiko Simonovics and on reading the articles on good housekeeping in the 1930s women’s magazine Magyar Uriasszonyok Lapja. See more on the topic at Dr. Eva Kiss: *Lakás és bútor 1920 és 1945 között*, Cser Kiadó, Budapest 2009.

48 Apart from the interior design of the period, these elements of the Hungarian folkloric heritage also had a noteworthy appearance in the Hungarian fashion design, particularly from 1934 to 1944. For more on the subject see F. Dózsa Katalin, Simonovics Ildikó, Szűcs Péter, Szatmári Judit: *1116 Years of Hungarian Fashion. Dress Culture in Hungary from the Conquest of the Carpathian Basin until the Early 21st Century*. Absolut Media Zrt. Budapest 2012.

‘menyecske’ and her urban dwelling counterpart, the servant maid ‘cseléd’. Both associations are only evoked in a very symbolic way, since the dress of the character – unlike that of the male character’s typical, easily recognizable ‘huszár’ uniform – does not refer to any particularly recognizable Hungarian historic costume of any period, region, age group or social position, therefore the weak association is only evoked by the also rather symbolic interior. Although the embroidered vest could seem familiar and traditional looking, it is too low-cut. The embroidered bodices of ‘traditional Hungarian folklore’ (i.e. its institutionalized ‘rules’ which have been secured in early 20th century) always cover the entire breast, while the breast-line of this item goes down to 2/3rd of the breast. The design of the white blouse does not belong to any regional appearances of the Hungarian folk heritage either, since it usually contains puffed sleeves, either short, above the elbow, either covering the elbow, or going down to the wrist with ruffled endings.⁴⁹ The blouse in the ad on the other hand sports ‘leg-of-mutton’ style sleeves which resembles the blouses worn by urban upper-middle class and aristocratic ladies around 1890 and 1900, therefore it fails to pass as a ‘folkloric element’. The skirt in the look is also shorter than the Hungarian skirts, which always hide the entire knee bone. This one only goes halfway down revealing the lower part of the knee. Its silhouette, cuts and the lack of any patterns, embroidery and the compulsory apron makes it be more close to the underskirt, the common underwear one or more layers of which (depending on the region, occasion social status) is traditionally worn underneath the embroidered and richly ornamented upper-skirt and apron.⁵⁰

49 The variations usually depend on the region of the country, and the age, class and the social status of the rural-peasant woman.

50 For more thorough history and sociology of Hungarian folk dresses see Dezső Malonyay: *A magyar nép művészete (The Art of the Hungarians)* Budapest, Franklin Társulat, Magyar irodalmi Intézet és

On the whole it seems that, while the styling of the ‘boy-ad’ character achieves a close, almost identical resemblance to the image of the ‘huszár’, the styling of the girl-ad character employs a more symbolic costume which only evokes a more distant resemblance to a “folklorish” dress without the use of one particular folk dress of a particular region. This could be understood as a gesture to avoid choosing one of the many types of different folk dresses⁵¹ and thus trying to represent an ‘average’ female Hungarian folk look.

The choices of clothing in both videos aim to represent a modern, contemporary, cool and stylish shift from the dignified, traditional, folkloric and noble old image of the Hungarian look. The stress on the *shift* does not only maintain the binary between distinct forms of attire, which are separated in terms of their temporalities (old-new) but it also reinforces the hierarchical order in which the honorability of the old and passed is needed to accessorize the fashionable and new which should thus profit from the quality of respectfulness gained from the indexing of the ‘traditional.’

The 2012 television advertisement is designed in a similar genre. It shows a young woman at the platform of the Budapest Millennium Underground line,⁵² who is posing like a fashion model, while her dresses change through several variations of regional folklore dresses to contemporary street fashion dresses and Hungarian style-fashion image-

Könyvnyomda, 1907-1922. Available electronically at:
<http://mek.oszk.hu/01600/01671/html/index.html?00000.htm&00000.htm>

51 Hungary has 9 geographically separate folklore regions with more than a dozen different kinds of folk dress traditions in each, differing according to ethnic and religious differences. The outfits within each folkloric traditions vary across the age, occasion, class and social status of the men and women.

52 Working since 1896 it is the oldest underground railway system in Europe.

items,⁵³ some of which were presented at the first 'Gombold Újra!' a year before. Her first look is an urban street fashion look, while her last dress comes from the "Metallic Folklore" collection of Renáta Gyöngyösi, the winner of Gombold Újra 2011.

Both female bodies represented in the 2011 girl-centered video and the 2012 advertisement reference unnatural "cloth-hanger" postures. The young woman in the 2011 ad performs a set of mechanically calculated, puppet-like gestures which seem constrained, difficult and rigid. Similarly the postures of the young woman in the 2012 ad seem equally constrained, unnatural and standardized because both choreographies require moves that by keeping the bodies in fixed positions allow the digital projection of multiple sets of clothing on the same body. This utilization of the objectified feminine body also serves as the defacement of woman as an active and embodied subject without an obtainable identity position. The depiction of a female body as a *surface* through which an army of folklore dresses and contemporary fashion looks march through in the 2012 video continues to use the symbolic of the 2011 girl-video, which accordingly portrays a shift between a symbolic folk-look and a symbolic new.

The gender regimes of these appearances do not only reveal a normalized devotion to compulsory representations of heteronormativity, but they also very openly represent a strong hegemonic masculinity and rock solid class-gender distinctions as the key organizing elements of the reproduced gender relations, showing an aristocratic, superior male, and a low-class inferior female character as typical representations of traditional Hungarian appearance in the 2011 ad. Although the girl-centered video aims to show a

⁵³ Image-items or image-pieces of a fashion collection are usually the more artistic representations of the key inspirations and creative elements which structure the style of the collection as a whole. These dresses usually do not enter the fashion market, they are either kept in the archives of the designers, are bought by collectors or are being borrowed to celebrities to show on red carpet appearances.

meaningful engagement with the discourse of the ‘traditional Hungarian feminine look *and* the contemporary discourse of (Hungarian) fashion, it misses this engagement since the universalization of the appearance of an *average* appropriately dressed, decent woman from a surpassed but treasured era of the Hungarian national heritage is not possible.

The visual organization of this styling represents instead an exploited, low-class young woman in underwear, with some parts of this thin clad (e.g. the blouse) not even belonging to her. The character performs a set of gestures keeping her head at a fixed position to be replaced by a colored, contemporary styled and smiling image.⁵⁴ For the analysis of how social practices and relations engender the representation of the image of a contemporary fashionable Hungarian woman in this particular advertisement, we must take into consideration the issue of having two separate advertisements which were designed to represent normative images of “traditional” male and female characters and their re-contextualization within a contemporary, stylish context where stylishness corresponds to the ideal embodiment of a homogeneous national identity. In this context having a male-centered video with more clearly and straight forwardly recognizable and decipherable visual codes stresses even more, the particular aim to produce contemporary Hungarian-style fashion that targets women as much as it aims to provide tools for creating an image of stylish, contemporary Hungarian femininity. This new image is built from an idea of a stable and coherent national identity and the happy acceptance of the place of women within the heteronormative gender regime dominated by a hegemonic masculinity. This is the vision presented by the 2012 advertisement as well, where the underground platform is populated by seven white, middle class, well dressed (and

⁵⁴ This happens much later than in the boy-video, only at the 7th second of the ad.

probably well-off) Hungarians. Two of them are male: a businessman looking newspaper reading young man, and a younger, student-looking street styled young boy with earphones. Two of the five women are having a conversation, one of them is reading a glossy magazine and two are engaged in phone calls. They all look elegant and good looking with a sense of contemporary urban style, implicating that the ‘average Hungarian capital-dwellers’ who serve as ‘extras’ is the advertisement of Hungarian fashion design are white good looking, slender, able bodied, wealthy inhabitants of a First-world metropolis. This symbolic cleanness of the referenced city space delineates the *rules* of the imagery of a homogenous and unproblematic national identification, layering the brick wall between Hungarians appropriated by fashion and ‘others.’

3.3. The discourse of femininity: fixing into images

I would like to theoretically approach the issue of how this discourse of femininity got to be fixed into this particular image by consulting the theories of Dorothy Smith on the discursive approach to femininity and Sue Thornham on the media practices of fixing femininity into images. The discursive approach to femininity in Smith’s argument understands femininity as a set of relations within a particular temporality which are embedded, determined and organized by particular social relations (Smith, 1995: 207). Its discursive approach zooms in the examination of the interface between social relations and the local sites of women’s experiences, the discursive order of which organizes the renewal of the imagery of femininity (Smith, 1995: 208). Coming from a similar path and in a few aspects furthering Smith’s argument about the enabling powers of the experience of a ‘double subjectivity’ related to the knowledgeable practitioner of the discourse of femininity, Sue Thornham is focusing on the cultural construction of the ideal image(s) of

femininity in visual representations of women in Western culture such as in art, photography and women's magazines. She offers a theoretically informed analysis of how media images of women *work*, what is it that they represent, how does this representation function and what kinds of social relations produce these images-as-objects of femininity which are forcing women to an over-involvement in the processes of regulatory regimes, yearning towards the embodiment of an ideal feminine self. She steps away from the ideological conceptualization of "images of women" offering a deconstructive move that exposes how the meaning and position of "woman" is constituted of "spectacle" and as such is "fixed into image", turning it into a matter of 'visuality' on consumerism's terms.

By understanding 'image' as both an image and a sign, making use of the cultural analysis of its discursive character (Thornham, 2007:26) she delivers a critical engagement with theories about women's images in art and photography together with the image as a commodity in women's magazines.

What both of the texts agree upon is the existence of a subject at work, and active subject that engages in the (re)production of the representation of a feminine subject-in-discourse the imagery of which reiterates, shapes, organizes and mediates the discursive (social, temporal, commodified etc.) elements of femininity. Therefore both of them operate with a discursive understanding of femininity the image of which in Thornham's argument is fixed and entombed in stable, unchanging and thus symbolic images of artistic and media representations that also contain references of the politics of their production. Smith on the other hand is talking about the discursive (re)production of femininity on the level of everyday social interactions, where the fixed and mediated images of femininity serve as

additional reference points and constructive elements of the relational model of the femininity matrix. According to both texts the gesture of referencing is a key element both in the production of the discursive social and the fixed image of femininity.

Since the 2011 girl-ad and boy-ad were produced in order to show on the one hand that “Hungarian is chic”, and that there *is something* to be “re-buttoned” they aim to represent the apotheosis of the enshrined ‘aesthetic moment’ that, according to Thornham serves also as the “manipulative moment, in which the subject-audience is submitted to the productive force of ideology” (Thornham, 2007: 29). Here the choice of media allocates the subject-audience as the seemingly undifferentiated mass of Hungarian television viewers, the ‘*everyone*’. This universalized target-audience performs the normalization of fixed identity positions of the ‘legitimate Hungarian citizen’ the ideal *everyone* who feels addressed by this campaign. Lower class, regional, ethnic identities, disabled bodies or non-normative sexualities do not seem to be part of the club.

Thornham cites Luce Irigaray in relation to the post-Renaissance artistic images of women while examining the dematerialized and fetishized body of woman, which are both being objectified and de-materialized by the symbolic, sublime, transcendent compositional logic of the artworks. Irigaray argues that “the moment the look predominates, the body loses its materiality” (Thornham, 2007:30). This loss of materiality and the ‘absence’ of woman as well as the ‘gaze’ of the audience are the key organizing elements of the 2011 and 2012 advertisements. In the case of the 2012 advertisement ‘everyone’ will recognize how the contemporary, new-Hungarian style dresses and the folklore pieces mingle creating a style of clothing that is worth to make our hearts beat faster filled with stylish national pride. The styling and composition of the

2011 ads on the other hand build on the assumption that the combined elements of the advertisements will evoke in the audience (i.e. *everyone*) the recognition of a maiden and a ‘lad’ from the traditional, commonly shared, known and preserved Hungarian folklore (referred to as ‘national heritage’), from the noble past, the golden age of the homogenous and patriotic national identity, the two iconic figures of which are the ‘huszár’ and the ‘menyecske.’ Nevertheless, the only item of Hungarian cultural history which could serve as a reference to this statement is the *János Vitéz*⁵⁵ the famous narrative poem of the most well-known patriot poet-hero Sándor Petőfi, who was one of the legendary figures of the 1848 Hungarian revolution. Petőfi’s life story and works, centered by *János Vitéz*, formulate the base of the Hungarian general literacy.⁵⁶ Accordingly the depiction of a ‘huszár’ and a ‘menyecske’, aiming to evoke the reference of the traditional, old, historical, folkloric Hungariannes, actually calls forth fictional characters of a piece of compulsory literature. At this point folklore in its ethnographic understanding, referring to objectified traces of the past, is replaced by the genre of popular literature at the core of the depicted images. Why is this an important shift?

If the advertisements broadcasted in all major Hungarian television channels, intending to reach *all* Hungarian citizens with the direct message of reviving Hungarian creativity on the 8th of March by organizing a public national fashion show, then the best possible way to do so is to reference the part of the national knowledge which is a commonplace. This

55 It was translated to English as *John the Vailant* by John Ridland in 1999.

56 Janos Vitez is the first longer piece of Hungarian literary writing which is the compulsory part of the national education program in the fifth grade of elementary schooling. This means that according to the legislations concerning compulsory education until the age of 16, every Hungarian citizen must encounter this piece of literature in his/her relatively early schooling career.

is certainly the most handy and straightforward reference to evoke the *belonging* to an ideal homogenous national group identity founded by a collective memory.

As I have tried to show so far, the discursive frameworks of the image campaigns mobilize the joined efforts of a governmental public diplomacy campaign, the spectacle of a public fashion event and the genre of a television advertisement to re-shape Hungarian national characterology, by introducing a trendy image to a neo-conservative nationalist citizenship the semiotics of which evokes the Europe centered cultural nationalism of the 19th century (Gyáni, 2012:491) and the representational logic of the anti-Europe nationalism of the interwar period. This contradictory friction of interacting oppositional perspectives is constitutive to the way the politically processed design communication utilized the spectacle of fashion for the purposes of nation brand image representation. Although the target audience of the initiative consists of multiple layers of domestic and international audiences such as the not at all homogeneous group of local citizens, the political and institutional bodies of the EU as well as the international EU citizens, who were in the position of focusing on Hungary and evaluating its politics in relation to its EU citizenship and the related national and international state of affairs, still the communications campaign fronted by the image videos, welded them together focusing on the ideology of the local audience as their key targets.

Thus reading the message of the advertisements from a local perspective suggested on the one hand, that there is a need to *resurrect* Hungarian creativity, to dig it out of its grave, where it was left or, following a more shocking narrative: buried alive, deliberately. The stress on a re-start, a re-introduction, with the usage of ‘újra’, the Hungarian for

‘repeating’ or ‘again’ in the name of the initiative implicates a temporality, a material past which could be and must be revived for the sake of experiencing proper Hungarianness. Implicitly the mentioning of a resurrection and the re-introduction of something old, that was hidden deliberately also allures the re-organization of the historical memory in order to sweep off the era of state socialism as something not worth remembering, and re-constituting Hungarian History from before state socialism, when it was all one and complete.

In spite of the institutionally claimed efforts of mobilizing this narrative to re-constitute a national, patriotic pride which – according to the aforementioned 19th century tradition of national characterology – could be nationalistic and European at the same time, the reading of the semiotics and meaning production of this discourse provoked critical voices both in local media and international relations.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ One of the sharpest criticisms in Hungarian media was Jozsef Martinko’s article “Gründold Újra” in *Élet és Irodalom* 55:19, 13th May, 2011.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to provide an example for the political utilization of fashion in relation to national identity politics by focusing on the institutional discourse of the Hungarian governmentally initiated national fashion contest ‘Gombold Újra! Divat a Magyar’ (Re-buttoned: Hungarian is in Fashion!) in its first two years of 2011 and 2012. I have tried to show how the institutional representation of this fashion contest is foregrounding the aim to reconstitute a renewed, stable and homogeneous nation-state identity. The obligation to produce contemporary fashion design re-using the Hungarian national folklore heritage utilizes a supposed collective tradition together with the generative, value producing social structures and ideologies of fashion as a cultural phenomenon. The result is a theatrical spectacle which flashes out the political ideologies of a new-nationalism, and a desire to gain respectability to the nation, through recycling the national dress heritage in the context of fashion. Although the context of ‘fashion’ is evoked by the rhetoric of the contest and its representation, due to its overtly extensive ideological saturation, the stress on creating a ‘national fashion’ as a counterpart and a concurrent to ‘Western fashion’ gets a much stronger emphasis than the aim to participate in the transnational discourse of fashion industry. In other words, while the governmental initiative ‘brands itself’ as the supporter of Hungarian fashion-talent’s access to ‘the fashion market’ its rhetoric, impregnated with historical politics (re)produces the ideological stance of the ‘other’ fighting for ‘access’ through the demand of acknowledgment by the assumed Western power center(s) of fashion.

I am particularly interested in the interrogation of this concept of a ‘national fashion’ from a fashion studies perspective, informed by feminist thinking. I am also aware of its

situatedness at the intersections of a Western theoretical practice, that references a particularly transnational industrial and cultural phenomenon, and a post-socialist Hungarian popular cultural context, which shows the symptoms of infections from state-politics.

Nevertheless this research also points to the lack of theoretical works in cultural studies on Hungarian fashion whereas the presence of the transnational understanding of fashion in Hungarian everyday life received a growing attention since the first decade of the 21st century and it has growing impact on the value systems of Hungarian youth cultures.⁵⁸ Furthermore, there has been an expansive governmental interest in the involvement in ‘cool’ cultural and economic domains, such as design, fashion and the fastest growing new industry of IT startup-businesses. The extensive impact of these cultural domains shapes the value systems of popular culture, while providing new basis for innovation based industrial growth and it is *this* multi-layered influential aspect of fashion which might have been recognized by state politics as a possible terrain for the ideological manipulation of value production. But this very aspect of the consistent multiplicity of fashions’ scopes yields its domain relatively (not entirely) resistant to ideological conditioning.

As Ulrich Ermann points it out in his work on post-socialist fashion in Bulgaria, understanding the economic as performative to cultural value production it will be visible how “the formation of new economic orders in post-social societies is not self-evident,

⁵⁸ Understanding that this statement should need a clear and well underlined argumentation, unfortunately there is no scholarly work which would address these processes of value production through and by fashion in Hungarian youth cultures, although it would be a very exciting and crucially important analysis to the better understanding of the unique positionality of the 21st century Hungarian youth cultures. What I know about this is mostly due to my own research interest and the past seven years spent as a teacher in graduate education of fashion and design, where I have witnessed the expansive growth of more than 20% in the number of fashion designer and stylist students.

but rather forced by efficacious discourses of modernization and narratives of neoliberal thought” (Ermann, 2013:1345). In other words, these new economic orders are not mimetically adapted but always interpreted, and along the processes of interpretative adaptation they relate to the state-socialist identity positions and accesses to commodity values as errors in the *past* ready for obliteration. The same relational process renders consumer capitalist change from ‘owner capitalism’ to ‘knowledge capitalism’ (Thrift 1998) i.e. the change of desire from owning material goods to the ‘renting’ of their symbolic values (Foster, 2007) to a desired *future*. For the possible *present* delineated by these positions I could paraphrase Hock’s notion of a ‘self-colonizing’ (Hock, 2013:37). She uses the notion to mark the situation in the arts in 1990s when art historians have first defined a ‘lack’ of women’s artists work and then they have contextualized the emergence of some women artists as answers to this ‘lack’. The self-colonizing developmental logic of post-socialist Hungarian fashion could be described analogously, with the addition of a self-proclaimed and re-iteratively reproduced marginal self-identification in relation to the already developed and ‘contemporary’ center(s) of fashion.

The constitutive presence of this marginal self-identification is fundamentally shaping the discursive character of Hungarian fashion in the context of which attributes like ‘European quality’, ‘world-class’, ‘could be equal with the great fashion houses of Paris and London’, ‘is ready to enter a world scale competition’, ‘deserves the right to enter any fashion metropolis’ etc. *mean* that the fashion product in question is ready to *step up the ladder* and/or has deserved the rights to claim that it has *arrived* to the stance of a fashion product in its proper, i.e. hegemonic Western sense. And this aspect of the discourse of Hungarian fashion gets particularly interesting at the point when a

governmentally initiated spectacular fashion contest is positioned at the center of the national-image representation and this contest obliges the competing fashion designers to get inspired from the Hungarian national heritage. According to this line of thought this would necessarily imply the obligation to render the heraldic items of the nationalist understanding of a ‘collective memory’ and/or a ‘shared heritage’ (both of them are equally essentialist and fictional) re-organized by historical politic, to seem ‘cool’, ‘contemporary’ and ‘international’ in their fashionable, and thus self-colonizing sense. But since the fashion initiative’s understanding of fashion remains to be a theatrical and glamorous spectacle, an event which should *perform* fashionability and a strong national imagery at the same time, it fails to work as fashion in its sense of a transnational, industrially grounded and consumption driven value-producing social and cultural phenomenon. Thus even though the representation of the entire fashion contest employed the representational logic of a fashion spectacle, the event remained to be a show of a cultural propaganda, without addressing the discourse of fashion *per se*.

The limitations of this thesis did not allow the more thorough and extensive research of the complete event series that could have included its expansion to Central European Fashion Days from 2013. Since the target goals of the internationalized (or regionalized) event are contextualized within the above explained framework, it could be stated that there is a continuity in terms of the ideological situatedness of both the national and the regional(ized) event.⁵⁹ The ‘twist’ in the competition announced for 2014 however, includes that the contestants are only allowed to be inspired from each-others’ cultural heritages and not from their own. The Design Terminal as the initiating governmental

⁵⁹ See the aims of the regional initiative at: <http://gomboldujra.designterminal.hu/en/> accessed on 09/06/2014.

institution even provides a Pinterest page for ‘inspirations’⁶⁰ to trigger the imagination of the Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and Polish designers about each-others’ ‘cultural values.’ The gender(ed) regimes of Central Eastern Europeans, national and regional identity politics and the cultural ideologies provided by the images which have been selected as visual codes of the ‘shared cultural heritage’ of the Visegrad Countries would most certainly provide a much wider terrain for another fashion studies analysis. However the broadening of the geopolitical scope of fashion studies to non-Western and post-socialist discourses, tracing their individual positions and attitudes towards an assumed homogeneous transnational fashion discourse could provide valuable insights to the critical addressing of the notion of ‘global fashion’. This particular Hungarian example serves as a valuable resource for expanding research on Hungarian historical politics to the field of popular culture, which is being utilized to deliver the institutionally re-framed matrix of national culture and history in an increased proportion within the past few years. The expansive penetration of politically regulated narratives in Hungarian cultural discourses point towards attempts to govern the value production systems of everyday life in an extent which is assumed to be expatriated from the European Union. Therefore even though this research has started out as a research on a particular aspect of Hungarian fashion, it has become a research of a particular version of institutionalized historical politics that speaks to the ambivalent geopolitical situatedness of Hungary as a post-socialist nation state within Central Eastern Europe bearing the double framing of ‘Europeanness’ as a member state of the European Union and the reinscription of its otherness from a ‘fully’ or ‘sufficiently’ European context.

⁶⁰ See the ‘inspirations’ sub-page at <http://www.pinterest.com/cefashiondays/inspiration/> accessed on 08/06/2014.

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<http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kozigazgatasi-es-igazsagugyi-miniszterium/tarsadalmi-kapcsolatokert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/alg-egy-honap-alatt-446-munka-erkezett-be-a-kim-gombold-ujra-divat-a-magyar-palyazatara>

<http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kozigazgatasi-es-igazsagugyi-miniszterium/tarsadalmi-kapcsolatokert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/brusszelben-is-divat-a-magyar-gombold-ujra-kiallitas-a-belgiumi-design-fesztival-kereteben>

Közzszolgálat Magazin (2011) 1:1 and (2012) 2:5.

Calls for tenders:

<http://palyazatok.org/gombold-ujra-divattervezes-palyazat/>

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-327_en.htm

http://www.pafi.hu/_pafi/palyazat.nsf/ervdocidweburlap/270B2B6F35056DE3C125783E00434935

<http://palyazatok.org/gombold-ujra-divat-a-magyar-2-0-kortars-oltozekkollekcio-tervezesi-palyazat-2012/>

<http://www.tmamk.hu/download/Gombold2.pdf>

Image videos (2011-2012)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Z_P387mifU

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_mSalUjTIE

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BU54MJVpSo>

The 2011 First Prize collection of “Gombold Ujra! Divat a Magyar!” fashion contest

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bc01Oi39a_U

The 2011 Award Ceremony of Gombold Ujra! Divat a Magyar!” fashion contest

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bc01Oi39a_U

Balassi Hungarian Cultural Institute

<http://www.balassiintezet.hu/en/balassi-institute-hq/#.U4L3zfmSy8Y>

Other links:

<http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/4-22.html>

<http://www.acg.hu/>

<http://hgmedia.hu/kozpenzek/magyarorszag-soros-eu-elnokegenek-btl-kommunikacios-feladatai/>