

[...] if we want to know what value can be attributed to our view that the development of civilization is a special process, [...] we must ask ourselves to what influences the development of civilization owes its origin, how it arose, and by what its course has been determined.¹

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Staircase, Berggasse 19,
Vienna 1938

The Origin of Psychoanalysis

Monika Pessler

To this day, the unique legacy of the Sigmund Freud Museum on Vienna's Berggasse is inscribed within the collective memory as a significant memorial site in two ways: As the *birthplace of psychoanalysis*—which at the beginning of the last century, offered a new perspective through which to regard oneself—and as a memorial site that commemorates the loss of culture and humanity that resulted from the National Socialist reign of terror.

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The prominent address, where Freud studied the human psyche and established the science of the unconsciousness, is visited annually by more than 100,000 visitors from around the globe—a figure that will no doubt increase in the future. The museum reopened in summer 2020 following completion of a comprehensive renovation, including modernized infrastructure and an addition that resulted in approved accessibility, a new museum shop and cafe, and nearly double the previous exhibition space—all in compliance with landmark protection laws.

From the beginning, the crux of the museum redesign was its *genius loci*, i.e. the specific atmospheric quality that lends this place its unique character: that of a lost world that memorializes not only the achievements of European modernity but also the downfall of its civilization.

In writing about architecture that is instilled with the aura of a place and its representation, Jan Pieper suggests that «the character of the location, the *genius loci*, seems to be its actual content, which the architecture should not overlay but frame—or better yet: liberate.»² The building on Berggasse thus carries within it the answer to the question of how the *birthplace of psychoanalysis*, with all the implications thereof, should comport itself in the future: The architecture of this *Gründerzeit* building not only defined the redesign with regard to space, it also correlates with the significance of subject matter.

In this light, the two collections belonging to the historic house museum, which was founded in 1971, were reviewed and later supplemented by additional purchases and loans. These collections represent the life and work of Sigmund Freud and, alongside original objects, images, and photographs, also include

numerous books—first editions and signed copies—and a collection of contemporary art, currently comprised of sixteen works by international artists, which was established in the mid 1990s by American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth.

Aware of the impossibility of including every complex storyline associated with Berggasse 19 in the catalog at hand, a focus has been placed on specific topics as they relate to Freud's living and working spaces. In doing so, the conception for the museum relaunch has essentially followed two design principals that engage in mutual dialog with one another: Firstly, the various exponents provide insights into Freud's multilayered work and highlight significant professional and biographical factettes of his life and those of this family. Secondly, portions of his workplace have been preserved, and provide an authentic experience of the *birthplace of psychoanalysis*—the paths leading visitors through the exhibition today are the same that the Freud family and their guests once navigated. Thus, the historic staircase with etched window panes that leads up to the Freud rooms is in fact the first exhibition space.

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The other rooms, or chapters if you will, of Freud's private living space are dedicated to his family history, his early work as a physician and neurologist, his occupation with hypnosis and hysteria, and his studies into the world of dreams, as well as his self-analysis, which became the founding stage of psychoanalysis. Walking through the space, the extent to which Freud's family and social life influenced his theories becomes readily apparent, as does the ways in which everyday observations found their way into his writings.

A dynamic series of contemporary questions and issues regarding psychoanalysis and other related disciplines are addressed in the portion of the exhibition space that used to be Tante Minna's salon and the family's living and dining room. The first exhibition following the relaunch will provide insight into the more than five different psychoanalytical schools that have developed out of Freudian psychoanalysis, including modern drive theory and conflict theory, the main proponents and ideas of structural and regional psychoanalysis, the object relations theory, and self-psychology.

As private and professional life was strictly separated, the exhibition continues out the door of the apartment and over to Sigmund and Anna Freud's psychoanalytical practice opposite via the staircase landing. The «waiting room,» which also served as the meeting place for the first psychoanalytical working group, known as the Wednesday Psychoanalytic Society, is dedicated to the institutionalization and international dissemination of psychoanalysis.

The foci of Freud's «study» and «treatment room» are his cultural theoretical writings, comprehensive correspondence, and the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. The jib door, which once permitted people to discreetly exit the practice, has been opened again for the public, rendering a significant aspect of the psychoanalytical treatment process visible: the preservation of the privacy of analysands.

The original interiors of the «wardrobe» and «waiting room» give off the same aura to museumgoers as they would have to Freud's clients, and render the absence of the psychoanalytical icon, Freud's couch, all the more noticeable. This void, which has existed in Freud's treatment room since his flight from the National Socialist regime, clearly represents the dark side of history. To reconstruct a «world of yesterday» within these rooms—i.e. a world before the March 1938 *Anschluss* (annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany), as if Freud's forced exile in London never happened—would be to negate a significant part of Freud's history and, in doing so, negate ours. Freud's «cultural work» undertaken at Berggasse 19 will thus be presented without a faithful reconstruction of the *status quo ante*, even though that would have been possible thanks to a young Edmund Engelman, who risked his life by photographing the apartment and practice of Sigmund and Anna Freud in May of 1938 in order to provide future generations with an impression of the *birthplace of psychoanalysis*. These important visual documents are granted their own special place within the new exhibition design.

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Interestingly, one of the Engelman pictures depicts the narrow and intimate hallway that leads from the psychoanalytical treatment room to the wardrobe. In it, we see the chair that Freud, who had suffered from cancer for many years, used to sit in while his daughter Anna helped him clean his oral prosthesis. In accordance with the former function of the room, visitors learn about Freud's illness in this space. Documentary films, including the family's famous home movies with comments provided by Anna Freud, are on view in the newly designed video room located in the former kitchenette.

In 1923, Freud's youngest daughter set up her practice for children's analysis in the office and living spaces behind the kitchenette. Within these rooms visitors are introduced to Anna Freud's most significant work in the fields of psychoanalysis and pedagogy, which she, working alongside partner Dorothy Burlingham, pursued for many decades following her flight to London. We also have Anna Freud to thank for the fact that some original pieces of furniture, such as the waiting room furniture, which she donated to the museum upon its opening, have returned to Vienna. She was also instrumental in initiating the Library of Psychoanalysis, which has since grown into one of the world's largest specialized libraries of its kind, and has been newly designed and equipped with the latest technology during the course of the first floor renovation.

Apart from a few new coats of paint, the «wardrobe,» which was once used by patients of both Anna and Sigmund Freud, has been left unchanged since Freud had it renovated in the 1920s. This space, which once granted people access to the worldly profession of psychoanalysis, is also associated with something of an entirely different nature: In the early 1940s, a large number of Austrian Jews were forced into this hallway after the Freuds had left Austria—a «station» in a life of suffering. Seventy-nine individuals were put into *Sammelwohnungen* (group apartments) on Berggasse 19, where they lived with other



Sanitary facilities of Sigmund Freud's treatment room

- 14 families in this highly confined space until their final deportation. The fate of the Freud sisters, who were also put into a *Sammelwohnung* before they were murdered in National Socialist concentration camps, and other family members' flight histories are told in a dedicated part of the exhibition located in the gallery above the museum entrance and exit.

The second new stairway is dedicated to the history of the building, which was designed by architect Hermann Stierlin and constructed in 1889/90 on the spot of the house in which Viktor Adler, the founder of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, had once lived.

The thoughtful architectural ideas conjured up by the partnership of architects Hermann Czech, Walter Angonese and ARTEC-Architects working alongside Bettina Götz and Richard Manahl prompt visitors to draw conclusions regarding the original appearance of the *birthplace of psychoanalysis*: distinctive finds made during the course of the restoration process have been laid bare on the walls and ceilings on the mezzanine level—traces of the former uses of the living and practice rooms.

These, at first glance perhaps indeliberate-seeming, design elements engage in a dialog with features that are also characteristic of psychoanalysis. This means that Freud's thinking also influences the design of the new exhibition, and that key assumptions of psychoanalysis contribute to the redesign of the new reality of the museum; accordingly, the conception is far more committed to reality than to illusion. For «it is simply a fact that the truth cannot be tolerant, [...] and that is must be relentlessly critical [...],» as Freud determined with regard to his claim to scholarliness.³ The same method of thought that he identified in psychoanalysis, he likewise identified in the arts, literature in particular, and in May 1922 wrote to Arthur Schnitzler that:

[...] whenever I get deeply absorbed in your beautiful creations I invariably seem to find beneath their poetic surface the very presuppositions, interests

*and conclusions which I know to be my own. Your [...] preoccupation with truths of the unconscious and of the instinctual drives in man, your dissection of the cultural conventions of our society, [...] all this moves me with an uncanny feeling of familiarity.*⁴

The marked voids and partially-exposed walls that reveal the layers underneath may leave viewers with an uncanny impression. As Freud determined with regard to other things, however, «that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar» is also present in the uncanny, and can also refer to «something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and returned from it [...]»⁵

In this regard, the exposed, original room structures reveal the narratives that substantiate Sigmund Freud's existence and that of his family—*pars pro toto* for the many victims of the Holocaust whose stories had disappeared from the Austrian collective memory for years following the Second World War. The act of opening up walls and scraping at them gives shape to the confirmation that *yes, it happened like that!*, which not only lends purpose to the perhaps radical-seeming exhibition redesign, but also legitimizes it. To sense the *birth-place of psychoanalysis*, to see it, to make a complete picture from the layers and voids, the exhibited objects and works, drawings and photographs, remains up to the imagination of the viewer.

Exhibiting contemporary art assists in answering the question of the extent to which Sigmund Freud's work influences present-day discourses, and this will take on a special role in the future: For the first time, a selection of works from the museum's conceptual art collection will be exhibited in rooms located on the upper ground floor level as a type of «sensual supplement.» These were the rooms in which Sigmund Freud received the patients with whom he developed the «talking cure» in the years between 1896 and 1908. This are also where he wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams* and devised the foundation of psychoanalysis. The exhibition is entitled «Hidden Thoughts of a Visual Nature,» and includes works by John Baldessari, Wolfgang Berkowskis, Pier Paolo Calzolari,

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Viktor and Emma Adler in the garden of their residence, Berggasse 19, Vienna 1886

Jessica Diamond, Georg Herold, Susan Hiller, Ilya Kabakov, Joseph Kosuth, Sherrie Levine, Haim Steinbach, Franz West, and Heimo Zobernig. Not unlike psychoanalysis, the conceptual basis behind these works of art is also the study of the concealed powers, structures, and functions of the human psyche.

Because thoughts are only productive and relevant for the future «when the time in which the commemoration takes place extracts something out of what has been remembered,»⁶ the Sigmund Freud Museum regards itself in its new conception as a kind of instrument of memory that gives particular attention to the humanities and cultural theoretical aspects of psychoanalysis in an effort to ascertain «what influences the development of civilization owes its origin, how it arose, and by what its course has been determined.»⁷

—— 1 —— Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930a [1929]), in *SE* 21, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 64–145, 97–98. —— 2 —— Jan Pieper, «Über den Genius Loci. Architektonische Gestaltungen einer antik-römischen Idee,» *Ort. Erinnerung. Architektur. Über den Genius Loci*, special issue of *Kunstforum International* 69 (1984): 38–59, 44 (quote translated by Penalzo Patzak & So.). —— 3 —— Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, (1933a [1932]), 160. —— 4 —— Ernst L. Freud, ed., *The Letters of Sigmund Freud*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1970), 344–345. —— 5 —— Freud, «The «Uncanny»,» 1919h, 220. —— 6 —— Gert Ueding, *Utopie in dürftiger Zeit: Studien über Ernst Bloch* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 79 (quote translated by Penalzo Patzak & So.). —— 7 —— Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, (1930a [1929]), 97–98.

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