

# PRIVATE UTOPIA



August Sarnitz, Inge Scholz-Strasser (Eds.)

# PRIVATE UTOPIA

Cultural Setting of the Interior in the  
19th and 20th Century

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# Introduction

The essays included in this publication grew out of a symposium hosted by the Sigmund Freud Foundation in Vienna in 2013. They are an extended distillation and refinement of the symposium with new papers added in order to open up the discourse to a wider frame of perspectives.

The two-day symposium on the topic “Interiors—Living-Space, Art-Space, Work-Space” took place in cooperation with the Vienna Art Week on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2013 and was organized within the context of the photo exhibition “Lucian Freud: In Private” which was on show at that time at the Sigmund Freud Museum. Spatial concepts of interiors from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century were lectured on and discussed from various perspectives.

Discussing “Interiors” includes not only the discussion of design and architecture in their most radical and experimental qualities, but also their social, cultural, philosophical, and psychological aspects which directly and indirectly influence our physical wellbeing.

“The particularization of every interior, as Benjamin reveals, is at once an impoverishment and an attempt to overcome this. For every dwelling denies its own existence as a place, once inhabited, it becomes marked by the traces of habits that negate or mask its essential character. The home becomes a nostalgic microcosm in which the consumption and end of experience and the manifestation of poverty overlap, with neither superseding the other. In the face of this interwoven system of contradictions that confounds and throws into disorder the very purpose of dwelling, certain episodes of modern architecture may be seen as attempts to realize an ultimately impossible utopia ... The modern utopia of dwelling takes its characteristic features from the nostalgia that wafts through every *intérieur*.” (Francesco Dal Co, *Figures of Architecture and Thought*, p.13)

The discussion starts with a conversation between Helmut Strutzmann and Inge Scholz-Strasser on the theme of “The Sigmund Freud Museum as Interior?” It will seek to place “Berggasse 19” within its diversity—as a former medical practice, knowledge area of new theories about the human soul, a meeting place of many intellectuals

of the time, and a private apartment for the Freud family – and to understand the apartment in its entire meaning in today's presentation. Referring to Pierre Nora's understanding of a "Lieu de mémoire," —the importance of a historically charged place in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—the Sigmund Freud Museum will receive attention at the same time in the context of the current museum debate.

Jeanne Wolff-Bernstein in her contribution reflects on the distinct interiors, the time and the space in which Lucian Freud's models and Sigmund Freud's patients experienced the interior spaces. It refers to the possible parallels between the working methods of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and his grandson Lucian Freud and on the function of the interiors in their diversity, drawing on each individual formative intimate setting.

In his literary-historical contribution "Proust's Interiors; Between Montesquiou and Yturri", Rubén Gallo refers to the importance both personalities had in the Paris of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the biography of Proust and the genesis of his publication of the "Recherche du Temps Perdu." Fascinated and attracted to the wealthy dandy Montesquiou and his lover and secretary Yturri, the death of the latter was decisive in Proust's withdrawal into his "inner worlds." Both forgotten as writers long ago, they find a place in the "Recherche du Temps Perdu" as a "repository of lost time," their place in "the pantheon of literary history."

Spyros Papapetros in his paper: "Drop Form: Freud, Dora and Dream Space" investigates a possible link between the origin of modern theories of architectural space and the institutionalization of Freud's therapeutic practice. The proposed reinterpretation focuses on the interaction between articles of adornment and the interior spaces that the later famous analysand "Dora" occupied during the dream narrative. Perhaps Freud's introduction of these "drop form" pendants aimed not simply to make these small artefacts oscillate but to drop the very concepts of form and space entirely.

Cornelia Klinger focuses in her article "Interior Spaces and Other Playgrounds of Inwardness" on the socio-historical conditions of modern subjectivity, as this constitutes itself in interior space. She makes the case that the specifically modern form of subjectivity / individuality with the right to self-expression and self-realization finds its actual unfolding in the private and in the aesthetic sphere of the interior.

At the end of the present volume, two contributions from two pioneering architects/philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be discussed: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Frederick Kiesler.



August Sarnitz discusses the radical nature and modernity of the architecture of the Stonborough-Wittgenstein House (1926–1928), designed by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (jointly with Paul Engelmann) for his sister Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein. Architecture and interior design combine to form a personal cosmos—a private utopia in the truest sense—represented by the collecting passion of Margaret Stonborough. Contemporary and historical art objects, valuable historical (Louis XVI) and modern furniture (Josef Hoffmann, Dagobert Peche) “inhabit” the built utopia as a collage. The radical house of Ludwig Wittgenstein “allowed” no curtains, no carpets and no lighting fixtures other than the bare bulb. The private utopia can only be as radical and as subjective in a “Freudian dreamland” placed in Vienna.

The radical nature of Frederick Kiesler’s architecture addresses parallel worlds of urbanism and the private. In her contribution “Endless Interior: Kiesler’s Architecture as Psychoanalysis”, Beatriz Colomina argues this specific position of the architect.

Colomina presents convincing arguments when analyzing Frederick Kiesler. This still too-little-known architect, designer, sculptor, and theorist (concept of “correalism”) founded radical positions of self-realization. His “Endless House” is an example of the metaphorical utopia of a continuous interior.

Discussing interiors reveals multi-layered arguments on private, artistic, and professional environments of the human habitat. Discussing interiors leads to people’s secrets and unknown positions and possessions. For Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* is what is familiar and yet at the same time strange. It involves what is both secret and formerly familiar in itself. (The Uncanny, in: Freud Sigmund, The Standard Edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, translated by James Strachey, London: the Hogart Press, Volume XVII). In that sense, we would like our “PRIVATE UTOPIA” to be understood also as a research into the field of the uncanny.

“The editors would like to thank all authors for their contributions and their wonderful cooperation and patience in the production of this book.”

August Sarnitz  
Inge Scholz-Strasser  
Vienna, 2015



1.1 „Therapy Room“, Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna.  
Photo Gerald Zugmann (1993). Archive Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna.

# The Sigmund Freud Museum as Interior?

Helmut Strutzmann in conversation with Inge Scholz-Strasser

**Walter Benjamin characterized the interior as the intrusion of the object world into the private world. "Interior spaces become thing worlds."**

At first glance the Sigmund Freud Museum conveys the impression of being the reconstruction of an interior. It presents an interior that seems to reconstruct a historical site. Sigmund Freud did in fact live and work in this house, in these apartments, for more than forty years. In 1938 he was forced to leave the country, and he died in exile. In those forty years, he created a very specific interior in the Benjaminian sense, whose components he was for the most part able to take with him undamaged into exile. In 1971, these rooms were opened as a place of remembrance. Only seemingly does the partial reconstruction reflect the interior in which Freud lived.

**Not only did Freud practice medicine in this house: he also lived in it. His apartments were modest in comparison to the interiors of the great Ringstrasse palaces of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.**

Sigmund Freud came from a modest background, from a provincial Moravian town in the Danubian Monarchy. His father achieved some success as a wool merchant, but the family lived in close quarters. Freud's youth in Vienna's second district was also characterized by a shortage of space. It was only in the course of his career that he became acquainted with the haute bourgeois interiors of the Ringstrasse, mainly through his house calls—for example to Anna von Lieben in the family's palace by the Burgtheater. This was certainly something new for him; it was the first time he came into contact with the wealthy Jewish society, its residences and interiors. One might also consider this as

Freud's learning phase with regard to his conception of an interior design, including features which he would later install in his own apartment in the ninth district, ten minutes' walk from the Ringstrasse. How do we even know about the arrangement of this interior? Shortly before the Freud family's escape in 1938, the young photographer Edmund Engelman was commissioned to document the apartments in pictures.<sup>1</sup> When the Museum opened in 1971, this photographic material was used to create collages arranged along the walls of Sigmund Freud's former office, where they can still be seen today.

### What do the collages show?

You see two rooms, the consulting room and the study, with their numerous antiques, his famous collection, arranged with seeming randomness, but nonetheless in accord with a certain logic. You see his extensive library, barely accessible behind vitrines and tables holding the collection, layers of knowledge, *bildungsbürgerlich* and materialized along the walls. At the center of the consulting room is the couch with his chair. Sigmund Freud was able to take almost the entire interior with him into exile. The rooms remained behind, empty. Subsequently this apartment, and several others in the house at Berggasse 19, were transformed by the Nazis into "collective apartments" for expropriated Jews. More than ninety people lived in cramped quarters in the house before being deported to concentration camps in 1941. The rooms Freud left behind acquired a second, horrifying connotation: emptied of their former bourgeois interior, they became a locus of terror. Thus the twentieth century's layered narratives condense at Berggasse 19, making it into a *lieu de mémoire* in the sense of Pierre Nora.<sup>2</sup> Here the continuity of the historic house museum is broken, and charged with additional meaning, making it into a site of collective memory of the twentieth century. By meticulously documenting the history of this single Viennese house, the 2003 exhibition *Freud's Lost Neighbors* shed light on the massive wound torn through history during the last century.

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<sup>1</sup> For photos see: <https://www.google.at/search?q=edmund+engelmann+fotograf>; or Sigmund Freud. Berggasse 19 Vienna by Edmund Engelman

<sup>2</sup> See also: Pierre Nora: *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Gallimard)

In summary: the Sigmund Freud Museum cannot be seen as a reproduction of a classic historical interior; rather it exists as an attempt to reconstruct the multiplicity of ever-changing attributions that come together in this specific place. It has primarily been able to serve the wider calling of a museum and research center since 1996, with the opening of the expanded museum which was facilitated by the incorporation of the Freud family's former residence, next door to the office. Since then the modified apartment space has been in use as an exhibition hall and a specialized psychoanalytic research library.

**Eighty-percent of the Sigmund Freud Museum's visitors probably come expecting to see a historicizing celebration of Sigmund Freud. They arrive at a house in which nothing remains as it was, with the exception of a few fragments of a discontinuous past.**

The attempted reconstruction undertaken in the Sigmund Freud Museum is many-sided and multi-layered. On the one hand, there is a bit of a replication: the waiting room furnishings were returned to Vienna by Anna Freud. This gives rise to an "auratic location", as it were, albeit on a small scale. On the other hand, there is the labyrinth of interlocking rooms, which conveys an air of absence and emptiness. Lastly there is the yawning gap, the missing couch, which is in London. Here in Vienna there is only a reference to its former place, an image on the wall showing where it once was.

Most of the Sigmund Freud Museum's visitors come with a host of fantasies regarding Berggasse 19, where they are seeking the *genius loci*. This is a characteristic aspect of numerous house museums. I am thinking of the Goethe House in Weimar, the Balzac Museum in Paris, the Mozart House in Vienna, and also of the Tenement Museum<sup>3</sup> in New York, to name just a few. These places share the common quality of being the "original scene" of history, and they are enriched by their supposed "aura". In the case of the Sigmund Freud Museum, visitors are searching for traces of the exploration of the soul. One might say they want to hear the lost voices of the patients, the echoes lingering in what once was a space for psychical complaints and

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<sup>3</sup> See also: <https://www.tenement.org>



**1.2** „Entrance Door to Sigmund Freud’s Practice in Vienna, Berggasse 19”, View from Inside. Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna. Photo August Sarnitz (2015).



**1.3** “Entrance Door to Sigmund Freud’s Practice in Vienna, Berggasse 19”, View from Inside. Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna. Photo August Sarnitz (2015).

afflictions, dreams and fantasies. In walking through the museum, visitors display a certain frustration in the truest sense of the word: the awaited interior seems to have absented itself, to have disappeared, to have been swept away. Delivering a complete reconstruction of Sigmund Freud’s office—something which has often been discussed—would not be sufficient. It would remain a fake, and in my opinion it really would not be proper, because it would negate an essential part of these rooms’ history: their use, as I mentioned above, as a collective apartment for Jews who would subsequently be deported to the concentration camps. After the close of the Second World War, the Freud apartments were rented to new tenants. In the late 1960s, when plans were already being made to open a place of remembrance for Sigmund Freud, these residents were asked to vacate and received assistance in finding new homes. The



1.4 "Therapy Room", Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna. Photo Gerald Zugmann (1993). Archive Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna.

museum's current arrangement uses emptiness as an indicator for the events of the twentieth century, which remain inscribed in these rooms.

The project of setting up a full museum spanned a period of thirty years, and it was executed in several phases. The expansion culminated in the museum's incorporation of the Freud family's former living quarters, which have been used for exhibition and research facilities since then. In the early 1990s, before work had begun on the construction of an exhibition hall, the artist and philosopher Joseph Kosuth created large wallpaper installations in the empty rooms of the private apartment featuring manipulated text passages from Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Although it was originally conceived as a temporary intervention, this installation—entitled *Zero&Not*—remained in place for several years. It became the first of many artistic traces



1.5 Joseph Kosuth 1987: "O. & A./F!D!(TO I. K. AND G. F.)". Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna. Photo Margherita Spiluttini (1987). Archive Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna.

that would be left in these rooms. Kosuth's work was nothing like the remembered wallpaper that Anna Freud ordered for the waiting room, and nothing like the didactic exhibition with its photo history: this was the written word on the wall, the artwork as a palimpsest. After it was finally removed, a doubled emptiness remained behind: the traces of its predecessors had been erased and the installation was gone, although several fragments of it were kept and archived. It was at this point that the Sigmund Freud Museum's contemporary art collection was initiated. For the most part, it is comprised of works of Conceptual Art.

### Conceptual art as a form of reconstruction?

The works of the artists in this collection represent an intensive exploration of concepts like condensation and repression, the joke and the dream. Here conceptual art takes up Freud's theories, realizing them in the medium of the artwork. In part these works are based on a sort of psychoanalytic reconstruction.