

BRUCE BARBER

Freudian Slip

IN DECEMBER 2000 I WAS INVITED to Vienna to participate in a symposium on art and activism titled *Was Tun (What to Do)*. The day after the conference concluded I decided to visit the Freud Museum at 19 Berggasse (Mountain Lane), which for those who know Vienna, is off the Ringstrasse in the ninth district, approximately two blocks behind the Sigmund Freud Memorial Park. Although this was my second time in Vienna, it was my first visit to the Freud Museum, coinciding, fortuitously, I should say, with my birthday on December 11. I initially had some difficulty finding the museum, but after asking a shopkeeper I learned that the location of Berggasse was "recht und recht," which turned out to be a mere block away. I knew that I was close to the museum when I spied a sign on the other side of the street reading, somewhat predictably, "Sigmund Freud Café."

Crossing the street I found the fine looking double doors to the building that housed the Freud Museum. Opening the right-hand door, I entered the spacious illuminated foyer and then walked up the few stairs to the landing, stopping briefly to inspect the hand worn banister, then continued up the next two flights of stairs to the museum on the next floor. Arriving at the museum entrance, I pushed the doorbell, heard the sound of a buzzer inside and then quick footsteps to the door, which soon opened to reveal an attractive brunette Fräulein. After welcoming me with a warm smile that exposed her perfect teeth, she directed me to hang my coat and cap in the voluminous closet opposite the entrance doorway, then politely requested the entrance fee, which if I remember correctly, was 60 Austrian schillings (ATS). She then offered me the choice of the English or German audio guide and a brochure containing a simple floor plan of the rooms.

It was 10:30 a.m. and there were very few visitors to the museum at this time of the morning. In fact, I was the sole occupant in most of the rooms. Attaching the audio guide earphone to my ears I began my tour at the entrance identified on the plan, spending some time inspecting the wooden rail with coat hooks, Freud's walking cane (inventory item 324A), his hat (item 324B), casual cap (324D) and travel trunk, all were carefully displayed there. From the entrance I ventured into the waiting room, taking time to view, with the aid of my audio guide, each of the many framed images on the wall and the artifacts displayed museum fashion in the beautiful cantilevered glass cabinet designed by Wolfgang Tscapeller, and installed in 1993. After circumnavigating the hallway and waiting room I entered Freud's consulting room, the space where presumably the analyst first met his most famous patients, the Rat Man, the Wolf Man and Dora. This again was filled with photographs and documents from Freud's early life, facsimiles of publications and artifacts from his professional practice such as his microtome, a precision instrument for making thin slices of material for microscope slides. My attention was drawn to the reproductions of *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1808), the painting by Jean Auguste-Dominique Ingres that, according to my audio guide, was placed in the same spot as an engraving of the painting used to hang. This was adjacent to the copy of the plaster cast of the classical relief fragment *Gradiwa*, the source of Freud's essay, *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiwa* (1906), and many subsequent dissertations on obsession and repression by the Surrealists.

On the wall opposite hung a reproduction of *Dr. Charcot à la Saltpetrière* (*La leçon clinique du Dr. Charcot*) by P.A. Brouillet (1887), again in precisely the same spot that had previously been occupied by a lithograph of the original. I then walked into Freud's study, possibly the most important place in this apartment, and likely the one in which, over thirty years, he spent the most hours. Moving slowly from exhibit to exhibit I noted with satisfaction the small table (138A), the brass cigar box (138B), and the famous copies from first edition book covers in their original German of Freud's work: *Studien über Hysteria* (*Studies on Hysteria*, 1895); *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900); *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905); and one of my favourites, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 1905). The room was full of reproduc-

tions, such that one began to question the authenticity of the original items in the room—the cigar box and the table—until, that is, I reached the space that a large photograph on the wall, taken in 1938 by Edmund Engelman, indicated his desk should be, and noticed a mirror fixed to the window sash in exactly the same spot it occupied in a photo of Freud in his study at the age of 81 (1937), one year before his hurried exit from Vienna as a result of the Nazi annexation of Austria to the Third Reich.

Elegantly contained in an ornamental openwork brass frame, this mirror (inventory item 243), had been given to Freud as a birthday gift from his daughter Anna, and was among the prized possessions that accompanied him to London during his exile of 1938. When the Freud Museum was instituted, Anna Freud returned this and other important artifacts to the study they had occupied for over thirty years, leaving the famous couch and other consulting room and study furniture in London. I gazed into this mirror, mesmerized by its solidity in this cornucopia of simulacra. A paradox! I leaned slowly towards his mirror and fixed my eyes where I supposed his laconic gaze must have rested on countless occa-



Freud in his study (1937)

sions during his afternoon reveries. On these occasions he would probably adjust his glasses, perhaps clip and light another cigar or arrest his thoughts to gaze out through the large windowpanes down into the courtyard below. He would survey from this vantage the windows of the wall of apartment buildings on the opposite side of the yard and perhaps ruminates on the social relations being performed within.

Freud's mirror. My gaze was trapped in this small mirror, its reflections projecting, inflecting so much history. I am not sure for how long I contemplated his mirror. Someone coming into the room at that moment may have assumed that I was a pathological narcissist. I wondered how many other visitors to the Freud Museum had engaged in this sacrilegious and potentially dangerous act. Among the many reflection/death superstitions there is one in India that warns against looking into the face of a mirror that belonged to another person, for your soul may become trapped and manipulated by the dead host. Slowly, reluctantly I averted my eyes from the mirror, travelling my gaze down to focus upon the warm tones of the parquet floor and then racking my gaze slowly like the lens of a movie camera back up and around the walls of the study. I continued my journey through the rooms, stopping once spontaneously—now you may think this odd—to *smell* a section of wall.

It was good that I was alone. This kind of behaviour was clearly fetishistic and only worthy of a celebrity hunter visiting Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. But what was this? Had I detected in that sliver of a moment the faint odour of stale cigar smoke? Could Freud's tobacco smells have remained embedded in the cracks and crevices of this room for the past sixty years? Or was this merely the residue of the former occupants after the Freud family departed in haste for London? Could it be the museum curator's drive to animate Freud's life by blowing cigar smoke into the room at regular intervals? Surely not; my imagination was playing tricks. Dismissing these radical Delilloean thoughts from my mind, I returned to review the photographs in the study, pausing for some time to admire the famous reproduction of Jusepe de Ribera's *The Club Foot* (Paris, Louvre), which Freud had referred to in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. I spent another half-hour in the video room viewing the tape *Freud 1930–1939*. Then another fifteen minutes or so checking out the museum gift-shop, where I

purchased three books and several postcards, which were neatly packaged into a paper carrying bag excellently printed with the cover of Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality*. And then, feeling a slight pang of hunger, I decided to seek out a nearby café for a bowl of soup, perhaps a coffee, Viennese style, with a glass of water and piece of Apfelstrudel.

As I descended the stairs a rather strange thing happened, perhaps the result of my exhaustion from the conference or, I must confess, the previous evening's somewhat excessive intake of red wine. My right foot somehow missed the second to last step, and overcompensating, I slipped and lurched headlong into the foyer below, managing to break my fall somehow with my left arm. As I picked myself up, berating myself for my carelessness, I felt a searing pain in my right foot. *Scheisse!* A broken bone, pulled muscle or torn ligament? I stood there momentarily stunned, felt my foot around the ankle and toes to see if there was anything broken or out of joint, and detecting nothing amiss, I limped slowly toward the front door. I stood there to catch my breath, then turning the door handle, opened one side of the double doors and shuffled out into the street. Hobbling with some difficulty, I found an artfully illuminated café two streets north of Berggasse, off Liechtensteinstrasse, sat down with relief and decided lunch was in order. I spent the next forty minutes or so having lunch, coffee, nursing my wounded foot and reading my Vienna tourist guide. Then around 2:00 p.m. I continued my tour around the Ringstrasse. At this point I was struck by the extreme irony of the situation. For the next three hours my flaneur's meander through Vienna was accomplished with an Oedipal limp! Of course the full significance of my Viennese misadventure was not evident to me until I began to reflect on it in this form. Mirror, cigar smoke, clubbed foot ... Oedipus ... the riddles of the Sphinx? I clearly had some unfinished family business to attend to.