

ANALYSING VIENNA

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I am a therapist, and I'm in Vienna, the city where Sigmund Freud taught and wrote and treated his patients for nearly half a century, until 1938. This is the 150th anniversary of his birth, so I decide to do some analysis of my own.

Given the passage of time, I fear there mightn't be many traces of Freud left in his home town. But if, as the originator of psychoanalysis recommended, you give yourself over to the experience and allow yourself to free associate, there is quite a lot that can be gleaned about Freud's Vienna.

The seat of the Hapsburgs, with its numerous imposing public buildings, was once described by a wag as pompous (full of pomp), artificial (full of artifice) and awful (evoking awe). It was at the incredible Schonbrunn palace that Empress Maria Teresa prepared her daughters for life as pawns on the royal marriage chess board under conditions of such opulence that the youngest, Marie Antoinette, made her infamous statement when informed that the poor had no bread, 'Let them eat cake'. Then there is the Kunsthistorisches Museum, with its wonderful Brueghels, Rembrandts, Vermeers and Caravaggios and the Hofburg, the resplendent chief residence, all of which attest to the Hapsburg dynasty's power and wealth.

Yet it was from the massive stone balcony of the Hofburg, with the wings of the gold imperial eagle outstretched above his head, that Hitler rallied the wildly enthusiastic Viennese citizens below to the Nazi cause. No doubt awful

displays such as that persuaded a thinking man like Freud, who was of course Jewish, to eventually up stakes and flee to the relative safety of England.

Until that time, I imagine Vienna suited Freud very well. For one thing, his apartment and professional rooms at Berggasse 19, now the Sigmund Freud Museum, are on the edge of what had always been an affluent upper middle class area, with no shortage of troubled, leisured women, who could afford analysis several times a week. And at the other end of his street was the Tandelmarkt, a jumble of second hand/pawn shops, which, before the war, were owned mostly by struggling Jewish shopkeepers. Freud had positioned himself right in the middle of his two worlds.

Having inspected Berggasse 19 from the outside, we decide, before proceeding inside, to follow in Freud's footsteps around the Ringstrasse, the five kilometre inner city circuit he walked every single lunch time. Within minutes, I notice how many of the nearby streets, like the Dr Karl-Lueger-Ring, are named after medicos. Perhaps this designation of doctors as the local heroes - not something I've ever seen before - is recognition of just how significant Freud and his colleagues were to the life of the city.

What intrigues me is whether Freud walked alone or if his constitutional doubled as a dog walking exercise. After all, he was a dog lover, especially of chow chows. Freud considered his Wulf, Lun and Yofi, with their keen intelligence and intuition, to be almost human. Perhaps the one human characteristic they did lack, namely the ability to speak, made them his perfect lunch-time companions. On the other hand, chow chows are notoriously independent and not very

obedient, so it might have been too risky to walk them on the busy Ringstrasse, particularly as it's hard to imagine Freud with a lead in his pocket.

Nowadays, because of the intervening office blocks, the giant ferris wheel in Prater Park is no longer visible from the Ringstrasse, but it would have been a familiar landmark to the famous walker. Freud was fond of Prater Park, particularly as his parents had often taken him there as a child. The wheel, constructed in the late nineteenth century, (and featured in the wonderful film *The Third Man*), was a magnet for generations of Viennese children. It's highly likely that Freud, a committed family man, who fathered six children in nine years, was no more immune to pester power than the next parent. My guess is he spent lots of time in the park as an adult. With that in mind, we detour and enjoy a panoramic view of the city laid out below, from one of the replicas of the original gondolas, each designed to look just like an ancient rail carriage.

A little later, back on track, and saturated by a flash rain storm, I wonder whether Freud ever cheated and hopped on a passing Ringstrasse tram. But I suspect he never did. Above all, he was an orderly man and didn't like to experiment, unlike some of his contemporaries.

Sandor Ferenczi, an analyst colleague of Freud's, once decided to try alternating roles, so that for one hour he analysed his patient and for the next, his patient analysed him. He stopped this experiment when he realised that if he were truly honest he would be constantly breaching confidentiality in his desire to talk about other patients. Apparently, when he ceased this mutual analysis, his female patient believed he had done so because he had fallen in love with her.

Whereas he said he had to stop because he had grown to hate her. Freud would never have been so rash as to proceed down that path in the first place.

Speaking of his path, we can't help but notice that the Ringstrasse and its surrounds are graced with an array of wonderful cake shops. Purely for the purposes of our research, it is imperative that we experience a wide sample. In Café Griensteidl I have the best apricot Danish ever, and Schlossgold's plum cake is to die for. In the famous and packed Demel's cake shop, with its gorgeous Baroque ceilings and dark panelling, food is theatre – signs request patrons not to photograph the chefs who concoct their magnificent ensembles, centre-stage, in the middle of the shop. But while the Viennese specialty, sucker torte, looks wonderful, individually presented as it is in fluted, decorated tissue paper, it proves disappointingly dry and pallid.

I wonder if Freud managed to resist those tempting diversions from his walk? Perhaps he saved himself till he was nearly back to the office and his afternoon patients. With that in mind, we drop into a small bar at the end of his street, where we conclude our research with coffee and the most wonderful, chunky pieces of apple strudel.

Well fortified, we finally enter Berggasse 19, the four-story apartment building, where the Freud family settled in 1891. The doors to the residence and the professional rooms face each other across the mezzanine floor. Although the doors were so close, Freud's behaviour behind them couldn't have been more different. Portraits of the doctor show him as unsmiling and even grim. But his friends enjoyed his wit and knew that he loved a laugh. When Sigmund and Martha entertained, guests were customarily greeted with a joke. (I wonder if he

ever made a Freudian slip?) In fact, Freud was so joke-mad that he even wrote a book on the subject: *Jokes and the Unconscious*.

I'm particularly keen to see the consulting room and the famous couch. Unfortunately, only the lobby (where his well-used hat hangs on a peg, ready for his next walk) and the waiting room have been restored to their original condition, so I have to content myself with the pictorial record of his work space. But what a pictorial record it is – his consulting room and adjoining study walls are covered with photos, framed documents and letters offering tantalising peeks into his personal and professional life.

Several photos feature the Doctor, surrounded by his beloved antiquities, in characteristic work mode, seated in a chair immediately behind his patients' heads. Patients reclined on a couch draped with oriental rugs, exactly like pashas. It astonishes me that in some photos Freud has a pipe in his mouth. Surely, up close and personal as he was, a spark could easily have fallen into the elaborate bouffant hair favoured by many of the women of his day. For those patients, therapy might well have ignited rather more than they'd bargained for.

One interesting feature that does remain intact in the consulting room is a small concealed door, to the left of the entrance, which leads directly to the external hallway. As the Viennese were notorious gossips this discrete alternative exit may well have seen regular use.

For Freud's anniversary, the museum has mounted a weird and wonderful exhibition on couches through the ages. The centre piece is Andy Warhol's movie, *Couch*, so sexually explicit it must be Z- rated. The film seems a bizarre choice for

a museum, but after the initial shock and on second thoughts, it feels ideal. After all, it was Freud who brought sexuality out of the closet - and on to the couch.

Freud's waiting room remains exactly as it would have been in his day. There is even an old Kachelofen (ceramic stove) still standing sentinel in the corner. The room is modest and unassuming, even shabby, with battered chairs long overdue for re-upholstering. There is a small brass plaque at the door, which reads simply: Doctor S Freud.

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