Lost Objects: Berggasse 19 and Absence in the Space of Psychoanalysis

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Typically, a lost object in the psychoanalytic sense equates to a lost loved person, although Freud makes clear that loss can also take the form of an abstraction such as a nation or ideal. The loss of objects at the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna has complex historical and psychical meanings. I argue that Freud’s escape from Nazi persecution and exile from Austria together cast his former home into a space of irremediable loss. The Museum not only marks this loss, but is also constituted by it. Freud’s evacuation, along with his family, followers, and treasured belongings, engenders an intractable melancholia. Haunted by its lost objects, the Museum suffers from the melancholic’s ambivalence. Its ambiguous status lies between an idealizing memorial and a site of critical discourse in which to reflect upon history’s atrocities. I concentrate on the role of photography and architecture in organizing the Museum as a “way of seeing” that is paradoxically based less on visual presence than on its absence. The photographic framing of the Museum’s lost objects reveals how substitute objects are enlisted in an effort to mitigate loss. Despite fetishistic desires to disavow it, absence forms the core of the Museum experience. I propose that a productive relationship to loss can be reached through Freud’s concept of Nachträglichkeit, which engages with a nonlinear temporality. Thus, rather than remain caught in a melancholic loop, the visitor can orient herself to the potentiality of a history subject to revision.
Historical Context of Freud’s Exile and Engelman’s Photos

In April 1938, Edmund Engelman, a young photographer and engineer, was asked to photograph Sigmund Freud’s home and office at Berggasse 19, where the psychoanalyst had lived and worked for the past forty-seven years. Freud had written to his former analysand, the American poet H.D., that it would be unpleasant to go into exile at the age of seventy-eight. In fact, Freud was eighty-two when he was exiled. The world-renowned analyst had remained in Vienna much longer than other Jews who had the means to flee. But when the Gestapo arrested his daughter Anna, though they eventually released her, he was convinced it was time to go. The psychoanalyst August Aichorn anticipated that a record of the original site of psychoanalysis would be essential in reconstituting the past at some point in the future when a museum might be erected. Engelman, also a Jew, was charged with preserving for history the very image we have of psychoanalysis. Any contemporary understanding of the origins of psychoanalysis is still very much conditioned by these photographs. Almost every image in the popular imagination of the analytic couch in its bourgeois scene complete with Greek and Egyptian idols is derived from Engelman’s photos.

While the formidable bureaucratic and diplomatic procedures that would permit Freud and fourteen members of his family to escape were underway, Engelman packed his camera bag with a Rolleiflex and Leica and two lenses, 50mm and 28mm. When he approached Berggasse 19, a Nazi flag was already hanging from the roof of the building and a swastika emblazoned its entrance. In four days, Engelman shot 106 photographs, taking care not to be observed by the Gestapo who were stationed across the street. Because of this surveillance, he worked only with available light and without a flash. This point is significant to my reading of these photographs in
relation to trauma and exile. Walter Benjamin famously called for a philosophy of history that would seize the past within the present in a flash of recognition. Following Benjamin, Ulrich Baer links the photographic flash and the depiction of its frozen moment with trauma. Against these readings, wherein modernity takes hold of the subject in a flash, Engelman’s photographs connote a melancholic rendition of a history that cannot take place with a flash, neither then nor now. In this context, the shock that Benjamin and Baer require for modernity to recognize itself, for the past to become intelligible in the present, is curtailed. If the images Engelman took do not shock and are not the result of a flash, then what do they do, what kind of response do they ask for? I suggest that unlike Benjamin’s flash of recognition, these photographs demand a contemplative form of engagement: they require time, both in their exposures and in their reception.

The pictures resonate with a particular affect because of the long exposures required for shooting without floodlights or flash. On my viewing, they do not evidence Engelman’s anxiety at taking them under duress. Rather, they appear extremely methodical and purposeful. Because he did not want to disturb Freud, all of the interior photos are unpeopled; except one where he captured Freud at his desk, and the passport photos Freud had requested for himself, his wife, and daughter. Also due to the long exposures, all the photos were taken with a tripod, giving them a sense of stability. For these reasons, the photographs exude a peculiar calm. That they were taken on the eve of Freud’s forced departure gives them poignancy. Through their innocent and placid veneer, they take on a different charge, especially when viewed in light of their aim to preserve an image of the world as it appeared prior to a historical catastrophe that changed the ways in which one could understand humanity. Necessarily, it is this historically inflected viewing that we must take today.

Freud observed that both mourning and melancholia involve a gradual withdrawal of libido from the lost love object. Engelman’s slow progression from public exterior to private interior mimics the painstaking process of detachment involved in mourning. And yet, I argue that the photographs elicit a melancholic response. Rather than encouraging a withdrawal of libido from the lost object that mourning entails, they pull the viewer in more intimately toward an object that has been retrospectively lost. In the photos, the objects are not yet lost. Within the photographic frame there is no trauma to be seen. (Similarly, later I will expand upon how there is no trauma to be seen within the space of the Vienna Museum, which is not to say that it is not a site of trauma.) Contrary to the discourse of trauma that has developed post-Holocaust, these photographs do not perform the work of testimony or witnessing, at least not in the usual sense. These images document a moment that precedes trauma; they in fact anticipate it. By virtue of the abundant presence of loved objects within the photo’s frames, the viewer is invited to unconsciously identify with these lost objects, even and perhaps especially in the face of their absence at the site of their display. Situated within the now emptied location in which they originated, the photos of Berggasse 19 are recruited to Berggasse 19 to ameliorate the very trauma that prompted their creation. Paradoxically, returning the photographs to their origins serves to underscore Freud’s evacuation along with the prized possessions that accompanied him into exile.

The Freuds finally escaped to London in June 1938 through the analyst’s politically and financially powerful foreign contacts, including William C. Bullitt, the American ambassador in Paris; Dorothy Burlingham, a member of the Tiffany family; and especially Marie Bonaparte, great grand-niece of Napoleon and Princess of Greece and Denmark. Although he managed to escape, Freud died a stateless refugee, and four of his sisters were exterminated in concentration
camps. Trauma haunts psychoanalysis through the victims of the camps, as well as the many psychoanalysts and their families who fled but whose lives were stripped of the securities of citizenship, employment, and community. Engelman’s photographs mark both the end of an era and a desire to preserve history. Because his photos archive a way of life prior to its disappearance, because he specifically took the Freuds’ passport photos, and because of his own status as a Jew working under threatening conditions, Engelman’s project is intimately connected to the larger historical context and to the spread of psychoanalysis in the modern world as a story of exile. But the way in which they are appropriated in the Sigmund Freud Museum differs from Aichorn’s original intention, which suggested a hope that a museum would replicate the state of things as they once were. To the extent that this is possible, the Freud Museum in London succeeds in just this sort of memorialization. The Vienna Museum, by contrast, is caught between a desire to authenticate itself as the original site of psychoanalysis, which compels it to showcase images of its “former glory,” and a sense of historical accountability, which requires it to maintain the absence that resulted from massive political, social, and economic turmoil.

**The Space of Berggasse 19**

Whereas the Freud Museum in London suffers from an embarrassment of riches, including Freud’s couch, collection of antiquities, and library, the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna suffers the embarrassment of its losses. Yet, crowds flock to the Vienna Museum at more than three times the rate of the London Museum, which would seem to indicate that it is the site itself, boasting one of the most famous addresses in the world according to the Museum’s audio guide, that draws visitors. With a mixed attitude of regret and pride, the tour guide notes that the Museum is a special place because “there are hardly any originals; we have the floor, we have
the doors, we have the windows.” These bare material remnants of where Freud lived and worked have meaning not only for the psychoanalytically inclined, but also for those intrigued by the psychoanalyst’s celebrity, and those who honor the site’s historical significance. The curious part-memorial, part-museum, part-house, part-gallery, part-library, part-archive, part-research center at Berggasse 19 is itself conflicted with regard to its position on its own presentation. On the one hand, it admits to a sense of impoverishment; on the other, it stakes a claim to what that impoverishment means. The voice on the Museum’s audio guide greets the listener with, “If you came to see the famous couch, I will unfortunately have to disappoint you.” The presumption is that a visit to Sigmund Freud’s former abode will in any case begin with disappointment, upsetting expectations of finding oneself in the presence, and under the assurance, of the Father through symbolic objects carrying the force of the paternal imago. But Lydia Marinelli, the Museum’s former research director, construes the Museum’s apparent lack as one of its strengths. “As an empty place,” she writes, “which has nothing but an address to mark it and serves as a permanent reminder of obliteration and banishment, the room resists the affirmative construction of meaning and remains inherent as a block in traumatic constellations.”

Marinelli explicitly associates the Museum with trauma, an association I will take up to describe the specific interplay of visuality and temporality operating in its physical and psychical space.

As a “site stripped of its material core” by a history of war and exile, the Vienna Museum, according to Andreas Mayer, was “an institution in search of an anchor for a representation of its collective past.” This anchor obviously could not be found in the celebrated objects associated with the Freudian legend, but would be formed around what Marinelli identifies as a “constitutive absence” (in Mayer, 140). Marinelli emphasizes that the

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typical visitor as well as the Museum workers struggle with a sense of incongruity between expectations and actuality. As she stresses, “it is precisely this function of reassurance that the Vienna Freud Museum cannot fulfill. The expectation of finding certain traces of an individual, a particular history, is frustrated” (164). How, then, can the Museum respond to the absences that constitute it? Whereas the mourner, according to Freud’s schema, endures an external paucity, emptiness rather pervades the melancholic’s internal world. Because the scandal of its impoverishment simultaneously defines it, the Vienna Museum remains bound to a depressive relation to loss. Yet, contrary to the clinical impasse melancholia poses, the Museum’s ambivalent attachment to its historically lost objects affords some cultural, aesthetic, and political possibilities. I suggest that the Museum’s current strategy of display can be interpreted as an attempt, in the form of idealization, at recuperating its lost objects. Psychoanalyst André Green understands idealization, which is essential to melancholia, as a dematerialization or spiritualization. In this case, through the sublimation enacted by the Museum in its display, the memory of the father Freud is idealized and dematerialized, one could even say spiritualized, perhaps as an unconscious means of atoning for the violent history that necessitated his departure. The compensatory idealization at work in the Museum enables me to interpret the scene of psychoanalysis at Berggasse 19 as a melancholic response to loss, one that takes place through a complex negotiation of visuality, spatiality, and temporality.

The Vienna Museum supplies a way of thinking together psychoanalysis, photography, and architecture that complicates the relationship between psychoanalysis, temporality, and visuality. Architectural theorist Beatriz Colomina observes that both photography and the unconscious “presuppose a new spatial model in which interior and exterior are no longer clear-cut divisions,” adding that “the simultaneous and interrelated arrival of psychoanalysis and
photography marks the emergence of a different sense of space, indeed of a different architecture.”¹³ For Colomina, architecture, photography, and psychoanalysis are distinguished as modern media because they mediate the disruptions and confusions between internal and external space on the level of the built environment, the plane of representation, and within the psyche, and they do so in tandem. Freud’s apartments at Berggasse 19 exemplify the type of environment that Colomina describes. At its site, architecture, photography, and psychoanalysis conjointly mediate the remainders of historical trauma. Rather than through traumatic imagery or artifacts, the way in which the aftermath of trauma is negotiated at Berggasse 19 has more to do with the intersection of two-dimensional representation and three-dimensional space; that is, the activation of a spatial model along the lines that Colomina identifies.

The visitor who enters Berggasse 19 is met by the troublesome and troubling fact that the Vienna Museum problematizes vision. What does it mean to see at the Sigmund Freud Museum? What is there to see? I assert that the Museum’s immaterial core is supported by a photographic scaffolding that deserves attention. If the Vienna Museum is what Griselda Pollock has described as an “empty shell,” this shell could be understood as a photographic container.¹⁴ To authenticate them as the original spaces where Freud practiced his new science, the Museum obsessively exhibits Engelman’s photographs in each of the rooms outfitted for museumgoers. They are placed strategically to designate as closely as possible the location and arrangement of all the absent originals. To accurately point to items deemed especially significant, such as the missing couch, Freud’s desk, chair, books, mirror, and favored idols, the images are often cropped and repeated.

When the Museum first opened in 1971 as the Sigmund Freud House, Harald Leupold-Löwenthal, co-founder of the Sigmund Freud Society and assembler of the opening exhibition,
conceived of the Museum experience as integrally constructed through photographs. “The basic idea of its design had already been worked out: to present the 1938 appearance of the rooms by means of enlargements of Edmund Engelman’s photographs,” he writes.\textsuperscript{15} During this era, historian of psychoanalysis John Forrester visited the Sigmund Freud House, noting that “it was dominated visually by photographs, blown up to life size, of how it once had been, photographs that stood in for all the objects that had been removed to London when the Freuds escaped from the Nazis. It had a derisible atmosphere,” he continues, “perhaps one deliberately induced to remind visitors of yet one more loss that the war had visited on Vienna.”\textsuperscript{16} Although, in the Museum’s current rendition, Engelman’s photographs have been downsized and compete with masses of additional documentation for wall space, the visitor standing within the walls of Berggasse 19 is still struck by the redundancy of occupying a space composed largely of multiple images of itself. Ironically, photographs of the Museum interiors do not do justice to the phenomenological and perceptual strangeness of this environment. The redundancy of the photographic and physical space can be easily overlooked when reduced to two dimensions. However, I contend that the photographic mimesis of the physical space exerts a psychical impact stemming from a temporal doubling wherein the past is displaced and forced into the present. I will return to this temporal operation after discussing another notable element of the Freud Museum, namely its countervailing psychical effort to combat absence.
Freud’s study, Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna, 2013. Photograph: Lin + Lam

Freud’s study, Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna, 2013. Photograph: Lin + Lam

Fetishism of the Lost Object

As everyone knows, the couch has become the icon of psychoanalysis, its sanctity enforced by the ritual of treatment. Freud designates the couch a “ceremonial” of psychoanalysis with a “historical basis.” He calls it a “remnant,” one might say a memorial to the origins of psychoanalysis, which took shape in the reclining figure of the hypnotized subject.¹⁷ Years later, Freud would locate another memorial at the site of a dreaded absence. The fetish establishes itself as a defense against the “horror of castration.”¹⁸ The lack of ceremonial objects in Vienna’s Museum, epitomized by the missing paternal symbol of the couch, can be read as a castration which the museum attempts to cover over through the consecration of select souvenir items and the overdetermined usage of photographs, documentary, and archival materials. Such compensatory moves can be detected most clearly in the early years of the Museum. The Sigmund Freud House Catalogue, published in 1975, opens with a floor plan of apartments five and six at Berggasse 19. A greyed-out rectangle appears in the consulting room with an arrow pointing to it labeled “couch.”¹⁹ It is the only piece of furniture that is designated on the floor plan, and it singles out an object that cannot be found at Berggasse 19.

Very similar floor plans are included in both the English and German editions of Berggasse 19–Sigmund Freud’s Home and Offices, Vienna 1938, the most complete publication of Engelman’s photographs. In the English edition, like in the 1975 catalogue, an arrow is directed at a box with the word “couch” next to it (73). In the German edition, the word “couch” is inserted in the rectangular box.²⁰ These empty signifiers, like Engelman’s photos, indicate the absence of the referent and emphasize the metonymic function of the couch as a stand-in for the whole of psychoanalysis.²¹ Although such representations of the couch cannot operate as proper fetishes in themselves, they carry an “as if” quality that resembles the fetishist’s refusal to know
its own loss. They evidence the work of disavowal characteristic of fetishism: the knowledge of the desired object’s absence and yet the simultaneous refusal of that knowledge. Both fetishism and melancholia revolt against emptiness. Whereas fetishism inserts a fantasmatic substitute to occupy the space of absence, melancholia preserves its emptiness. Because the couch itself cannot be fetishized as it is in London, the Vienna Museum turns to Engelman’s photos to fill its internal emptiness. The Museum’s adaptation is to present the Engelman photos as fetishistic compensation for the horror of absence, perpetuating a melancholia that works to preserve the past.

In the 1990s, the Museum underwent major renovations and published a new catalogue with two floor plans printed on facing pages, the original version with the “couch” indicated, and for the first time a floor plan that does not seek to substitute the word for the missing couch, but simply maps the empty rooms (“Sigmund Freud Museum” 18-19). This might be taken as the Museum’s attempt to see and represent the space of absence. In a project description posted on the Museum’s website which looks to have been composed for the 70th anniversary of Freud’s death in 2009, the Board of the Sigmund Freud Foundation promotes the symbolic function of the Freud House as a “home for the furtherance of knowledge once exiled from Austria.” The next paragraph carries the same refrain: “The Sigmund Freud House,” we read, “can become an internationally known symbol of Austria’s great cultural legacy and of the significance accorded by [sic] City of Vienna and the Republic of Austria to knowledge once driven into exile.” If disavowal is a knowledge that cannot be acknowledged, one might otherwise say that it is knowledge driven into exile. The Museum’s current agenda can be interpreted as a desire to overcome its disavowal and to recognize the painful knowledge that comes with its traumatic legacy.

The Museum is not alone in grappling with the disavowal that accompanies fetishism. Thirty-three years after Freud’s forced emigration from Vienna, his offices were opened to a public that appeared to share the Museum’s pathological disposition. Marinelli reports that visitors frequently insist that they have seen the couch at Berggasse 19 on a previous trip to the Museum (164). This tendency toward disavowal strikes not only newcomers to the psychoanalytic setting, but seasoned critics and analysts alike. I have consistently encountered descriptions of Berggasse 19 that slide away from an acknowledgement of its present conditions to a hermeneutics constructed entirely from Engelman’s photographs. The scholar’s critical position or analytic distance seems ineffective in preventing the movement from present to past, from the real to the symbolic, from three-dimensional space to two-dimensional surface.

When visitors insist that they remember seeing the couch in Vienna, and when critics analyze Berggasse 19 as if its interiors contained the lavish array of objects as seen in Engelman’s photos, they reveal their fetishistic attachment to a pre-traumatic moment. Fetishism involves defensively fantasizing what is not seen. For Alys Eve Weinbaum, it is a process of re-vision.

According to artist and writer Victor Burgin, fetishism fills the gap between knowledge and belief: “The photograph as fetish object” he writes, “provides a representation that can bridge two-dimensional surface and three-dimensional space, that is, it moves the viewer between knowledge and belief.” Fetishism moves the viewer of Engelman’s photos from the knowledge that the couch is not present to the belief that it was. Expanding on Burgin, I suggest that the movement away from the actual space at Berggasse 19 to the photographic reproduction is one of fetishism. The critical eye knows what it sees is a photograph, and yet, in memory and fantasy, the absence (of the couch) is substituted by a presence. The social dynamic of museum curation and reception follows this fetishistic movement. Visitors who remember a couch
where there was none have collectively subscribed to a historical amnesia that takes the form of defensively seeing in the mind's eye the absent couch and all that was associated with it – the man, the movement, and the Jewish intelligentsia – rather than perceiving its enforced displacement.

In the brief memoir published in conjunction with his photographs in 1976, Engelman recalls returning to Vienna after the apartments at Berggasse 19 had been vacated. Overwhelmed by the emptiness that opposed his memory of its fullness, he noticed the outline of the couch on the floor. Returning a week later, he states: “The ghost of the couch had disappeared” (“Berggasse 19” 143). But in a 1977 newspaper interview, Engelman says that he discerned a white mark on the floor where the couch had been, and he photographed it. He remembers that he returned three days later to photograph it again but workmen had sanded it over. Then, almost two decades later, Marinelli recounts a conversation with Engelman in which he describes a dark shadow on the floor left by the couch, which he had not been able to capture on film (163). Since these accounts differ, it remains unclear whether the mark of this loss was resistant to photographic capture; that is, whether it was unrepresentable, or whether it was Engelman’s unconscious that was resistant to making accessible the image of loss.

As Freud outlines, both disavowal and melancholia involve a perceptual problem. The fetishist sees that the woman has no penis but disavows that threatening vision. The psyche both knows and refuses to know at the same time. With melancholia, loss is in some sense unrecognized. As Freud writes, “[The melancholic] cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost” (“Mourning” 245, my emphasis). Because the lost object is unrecognizable, the melancholic cannot admit loss and thereby relinquish the love object. Whereas the mourner will eventually surrender ties to the object, the melancholic internalizes and identifies with it, thereby
remaining bound to it. Freud identifies the shadow of the lost love object cast upon the melancholic ego, which retains its mark (“Mourning” 249). In the empty room at Berggasse 19, the unseen shadow of the absent couch is cast upon the space, rendering the Museum melancholic, in perpetual mourning over its father’s expropriation and expulsion.

Nachträglichkeit in the Space of the Museum

Freud’s concept of Nachträglichkeit – translated into English as afterwardsness, retrospective reaction, or deferred action – helps to describe the specific temporality of the space of psychoanalysis as it is represented at Berggasse 19. The temporality of Nachträglichkeit can be understood as a present-past, a present conditioned by the past in which the present has agency, for better or worse, to shape the import of the past upon the present. It is the traumatic event that occasions Nachträglichkeit. In her genealogy of trauma, Ruth Leys asserts that the concept “calls into question all the binary oppositions – inside versus outside, private versus public, fantasy versus reality, etc. – which largely govern contemporary understandings of trauma.”28 We can look upon the Museum’s efforts to come to terms with, and represent, a history of loss and exile as a form of Nachträglichkeit. Collapsing clear-cut divisions between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space, and simultaneously conjuring the past and constructing a present, Engelman’s photographs, as they function in the Museum, are made to bear the task of compensating for unbearable loss. Photographic plenitude stands in the space of emptiness and stands for the lost objects of Freud’s legacy.

As mentioned earlier, stepping into Berggasse 19 one encounters layers of mediation produced through a redundant dynamic between architecture and photography. The architecture appears both inside and outside of the photographs, both containing and contained within them.
The photographs physically frame the architecture, its windows and doorframes, but are also framed by them. There seems to be an excess of framing devices, which leads me to think about the place of the psychoanalytic frame within this picture. We can conceive of the psychoanalytic frame as a clinical injunction in both literal and figurative terms. The purpose of the frame is to contain the transference, those unruly feelings that spring from other people and other times that the patient projects onto the figure of the analyst in the consulting room. The apparatus of the frame consists of the appointed hour of sessions, the agreed upon fee, the fundamental rule of free association, etc. But Freud provides an analogy that opens up the frame to a more metaphoric reading. He instructs the analysand on free association by telling her to imagine looking through a train window and describing what she sees.\textsuperscript{29} The narration of the unconscious in this scenario takes place within the frame of the window where interior and exterior are superimposed. Recalling the workings of Nachträglichkeit, the superimposition of the internal self and the external world is accompanied by a similar superimposition of present and past. The patient is always in the current moment narrating her historical past. The layout of Engelman’s photos at Berggasse 19 demonstrates this temporal fusion, and thus the temporal experience of the Museum can be seen as analogous to the psychoanalytic process itself. Joanne Morra points out that the “excess of archival documentation” that fortifies the “seemingly empty” Museum forces visitors to glance about the space in order to light upon something of interest (100). This is precisely how an analysis proceeds by free association: images, events, and memories pass before the analysand’s eyes like the moving landscape in the frame of a train window until the analysand captures something upon which to dwell at length.

In her description of her analysis and friendship with the Professor, H.D. alludes to the unique temporality that psychoanalysis fosters. “It was not that he conjured up the past and
invoked the future,” she writes. “It was a present that was in the past or a past that was in the future” (9). H.D. captures the temporal disruptions that psychoanalysis imposes upon its subjects. It is this temporal discontinuity, an understanding that the time of memory can go against the grain of chronological time, which Freud introduced through concepts such as Nachträglichkeit and screen memory. The prominence of Engelman’s photographs within the space of the Museum provides a counterpoint to the chronological presentation of the “great man’s” life. It is almost as if the Museum asks the visitor to consciously follow the chronological timeline, while on an unconscious level the Engelman photographs – which line the lower half of the walls and thereby accompany the visitor at seemingly any point in time and space – seem to belie the reassurance of this conventional notion of time. The photographs serve as a tacit reminder that the past occupies the place in which one currently stands.

The Vienna Museum wrestles with a conflicted position that resides somewhere between an idealized fetishization of images of its past and a critical distance that mobilizes visitors’ frustrations as a means of fighting stultification. Perhaps these seemingly opposed interpretations of the Museum’s strategies for responding to loss need not compete with each other if one can reconceive of melancholy as a creative and productive force that does not seek to put the past behind us, but actively strives to keep it vital in the present. The Museum’s mode of melancholia may gain traction from the more adaptive mechanism of fetishism in keeping its ideals alive in the present. Contextualized within the Museum, Engelman’s fetishized and melancholic photographs precipitate for the viewer an experience of Nachträglichkeit in which, as Freud claims, the past is always subject to revision at a later date. In this sense, the photographic volumes produce an encounter between the past and present in which the present might revise our understanding of the past and activate what Foucault called a history of the
present. The Museum environment asks one to take stock of where one is standing in the present moment, and to consider the distance between one’s present stance and the image of the world documented in the photographs. It is both the commonality and the difference between the conditions of the ‘now’ and the ‘then’ that this juxtaposition urges us to contemplate. Rather than idealizing a nostalgic pre-war past, the juxtaposition of Engelman’s photos with the current space of Berggasse 19 would optimally provoke us to take responsibility for the present through an appraisal of the past.

Demanding and perplexing as this ambition may be, it is far from ‘derisible.’ More in keeping with Marinelli’s assessment than Forrester’s, history’s “obliteration and banishment” is permanently re-inscribed in the Museum’s present tense through photographs that work with and against the barrenness of the space. In his study of the culture of depression, Darian Leader proposes that mourning may be enacted by creating a “frame for absence.” As I have discussed, the proliferation of framing devices at the Vienna Museum indicates that Engelman’s photographs and their relation to their architectural surround might act as such a frame. A melancholic ‘working through’ would seem to be a contradiction in terms, but it may be the sort of contradiction through which the Museum can demonstrate the pertinence of its historical losses and their continued importance to contemporary life. The real and symbolic absence at the Sigmund Freud Museum functions not unlike silence in a psychoanalytic session. It instigates a frustration that can be put to use, providing a space for insight. For some, the disappointment of finding fragile representations where they had hoped to find solid objects leads to faulty memory or aggressive criticism of the Museum’s failure to gratify their needs. But other museumgoers

find this an incentive to contend with, and maintain the melancholic refusal to give up the lost object. These visitors can make use of the frustrations to their desire to see and know.

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**Notes**


17 Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-
Analysis I)” (1913), SE vol. 12, p. 133.


19 Harold Leupold-Löwenthal and Hans Lobner, Sigmund Freud-House Catalogue (Vienna:

20 Edmund Engelman, Sigmund Freud: Wien IX. Berggasse 19–Photographien Und Rückblick

21 I thank one of the anonymous CNPC reviewers for this insight.

22 The Board of the Sigmund Freud Foundation et al., The Project: Sigmund Freud Museum
project.html.

23 Marinelli and Morra are exceptions who ground their analysis in the “real” conditions of the
space.

24 Alys Eve Weinbaum, “Ways of Not Seeing: (En)gendered Optics in Benjamin, Baudelaire,
and Freud,” Loss: The Politics of Mourning, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley:

25 Victor Burgin, The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity (Atlantic Highlands, NJ:

26 I thank one of the anonymous CNPC reviewers for pointing me in this direction.

27 Ellen Edwards, “Photo Exhibit Gives A Penetrating Look At World of Freud,” Miami Herald,
November 1977, Box 158, Folder 18, Miscellany Freud Family, Anna Freud Papers, Library of
Congress, Washington, D.C.


29 Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-
Analysis I)” (1913), SE vol. 12, p. 135.

Joy Titheridge, American Imago 66, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 149.

31 Darian Leader, The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression (London: Hamish