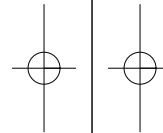


ATANGLEDTRIANGLE
Strands from the Archive-Rhizome

Vera Frenkel



strand one
The Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna

*Can a dwelling have a special power? It depends who you are, where it is and what happened there. . . . Regarding Berggasse 19, even for the witnesses, were they alive, the latter might be unknowable. We have the photos of the consulting room, the detailed accounts by Freud himself, elaborated or contradicted by others, a floorplan. . . .**

*From "A Narrative of Absence and Return," Vera Frenkel, 1999, unpublished catalogue text posted at <http://www.zaesuren.de>, with permission of the Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna.

For reasons I no longer recall in full, I was in Vienna that day, standing at the entrance outside the carved wooden door at 19 Berggasse next to an illuminated sign that clearly marked this as the site of the Sigmund Freud Museum. The man who had arranged for our appointment was ringing the doorbell.

I was tired. The journey from Venice to Vienna is reportedly among the most beautiful in Europe, but the train had been hot and I'd slept much of the way, catching only an occasional glimpse of river, mountain, or village as we thudded through, emerging still sleepy at the designated Viennese Bahnhof to meet my host and guide.

Professor X, a tall, gracious, dark-haired man with glasses, had greeted me with a little gift, and eager to please, had cheerfully trekked me half-way across the street to the silent doorway. He rang again, then frowned, reiterating how often and how long he'd confirmed the rendezvous.

Gazing up at the building's façade, I could see reflected in the front window what had been the Freud family apartment a calm and brilliant evening sky.

It was after eight on a glorious Friday evening in summer. The Professor rang hard on the buzzer, while I leaned back against the wall, picturing the game of Tarock that Freud and his friends had played there every Saturday night; thinking about sister-in-law Minna's night-walks from her bedroom through Sigmund's study to the bathroom; or the oscillating realities provided by the mirror over his door. Familiar images all, but seen previously only through the eyes of others.



I attempted a leavening remark: *Of all places to be locked out of*, I said, eliciting a wry smile. I needn't have worried. Perturbed though Professor X may have been by the failure of his plans, he was sufficiently close to his comforts. His lady friend, it turned out, lived nearby. We arranged to meet the next day, and minutes later I was free.

Daylight lasted long enough for me to find my way by streetcar to the Museums' Quarter in the centre of town, and after walking for a while, I eventually found my hotel.

The call came as I unlocked the door to my room and slung down my pack—a familiar voice from Canada inviting me to describe for the CBC what I had seen at the Biennale in Venice. Wonder what archive they'll put *that* in, I mused after I'd paused and stammered my way through the interview and hung up.

Before closing the heavy, red, floor-length curtains, I gazed out at the darkening city trying to locate the Berggasse in relation to where I stood.

Two days later, accompanied by a flurry of apologies and absolutions in both languages, the Professor and I finally were escorted into the Freud archive, part of which is still in Vienna (the rest now in the manuscript division of the US Library of Congress). And what an archive it was! The library where we stood was a large and pleasantly austere space beside a comfortable sunporch at the back of the labyrinthine apartment that had been the combination family dwelling and Papa's consulting rooms. Here, floor to ceiling, in addition to a special selection of Freud's



own papers, was metre after metre of books attesting to and elaborating his work decades after the family had been exiled from this very flat.

My task was to install a site-specific version of *Body Missing*, a multi-channel video work that addressed the madness of the Third Reich through its fetish for art-collecting fever; a consideration of the parallel migrations of artworks and humans in the context of the proposed Hitlermuseum on the one hand and the treatment of the Freuds on the other.

Ms Y, the devoted curator, provided a detailed and well-informed tour of the archive. Copies of in-house publications were produced, leafed through and discussed. Measurements and photographs were taken, after which we all three sat in the library choosing dates and listing technical requirements.

We talked at length and made our plans. It was an animated discussion. My account of what happened in the wake of that pleasant encounter must wait for the archive that is the protagonist of this tale, and the relation between art and we are tracing. Despite everything, I continue to savour the glow of that initial meeting.

Sitting as colleagues at the big white table in the Museum library that evening, day, looking up from time to time at each other and at the metres of books on their many sizes, typefaces, colours, and languages, all devoted to the exchange of mutual goodwill was palpable and our plans totally absorbing.

(*A Parenthesis: Random signs of the rhizome*)

The Professor went to make coffee, Ms Y to answer the phone.

Resting for a moment between the staged formalities of the visit, I thought simply how very much I liked the archives; their different shapes, sizes, and smells, their aura of mission, their archaeological desires and their necessary eccentricities.

A talk by the scholar Molly Nesbit more than a decade earlier came to mind. It was at the 1987 Duchamp Symposium organized by Dennis Young and Thierry de Duve in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She spoke of her adventures along the Rue des Archives in Paris; of how she had managed to persuade a series of municipal functionaries in successively smaller and smaller offices (or so I remember the tale . . .) to allow her to examine student *cahiers* from the year 1904 or thereabouts. Through these exercise books she discovered that when little Marcel was in school, boys were expected to draw how things *worked*—the rendering of a coffee-grinder and its dismantled parts, for example, was a standard assignment—while his little girl schoolmates, were required to draw how things *looked*—asked to represent vases of flowers, kittens, rabbits, doves, and the like.

I can see still those projected images of gendered pencil-drawings, small on blue-lined notebook pages with red-ruled margins, and remember how grateful I felt to the archivists whose task it had been to catalogue them, and to the woman who had retrieved and thought about them and their meanings. But this was a faint reminiscence, circumnavigating the sacred realm of archive itself, like kissing through a veil. . . .

Ten years later, at the University of Regina Library, noticing a stack of grey unlabelled boxes against a long wall, I discovered the unlikely whereabouts of the Theodore Heinrich papers. With the librarian's permission and borrowed white gloves, I untied the grosgrain ribbons on the folders of letters he had written home almost daily between 1933 and 1947, and began to read.

Sharing his growing experience of the war first from Oxford, then from Paris, the letters crossed ocean and continent to reach his parents in California, continuing from Munich after his appointment to the US Army's Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section (MFA & A). Among other things, he was assigned to oversee processes of restitution and restoration of art works that had been wrenched from public and private collections throughout Europe during the Third Reich.

The University librarian at the time expressed regret that there were no funds with which to organize a storehouse of vivid material. Ted Heinrich's life had spanned the century, from his California birth and Oxford studies to his later membership in Cole Porter's party-loving circle with its annual Fabergé Easter egg exchanges; from his unlikely friendship with June Wayne, founder-doyenne of LA's Tamarind Press and acknowledged rescuer of stone lithography in North America to his directorship of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and later professorship at York University. It was at York where, as a young recruit to the staff faculty, I first saw him carrying his books and papers in a plastic shopping bag, walking softly along the corridors in well-polished shoes.

One crisp winter day between classes, Professor Heinrich confided his plan to entitle a chapter of his memoirs *People of no consequence I have met*. "It will make an intriguing chapter, don't you think?" he grinned. Somewhere in the still-unsorted material in those boxes would be his descriptions of the war, of no consequence I had looked forward to meeting, along with the compelling eyewitness accounts. I had kept of a particular aspect of the aftermath of war: the seemingly unending consequences of a war, a roundabout way, then, Theodore Heinrich and his testimony were markers on the path that had led me to the door of the Freud Museum that Friday evening.

The MFA& A Section of the US Armed Forces was an entity whose mandate and activities had been with me for some time. That my late colleague had been among those rescuing drawings, documents, and photographs after 1945 was an uncanny discovery, underscoring a shared but unexpressed interest.

How Ted's papers got to the University of Regina—how any papers get anywhere—is a whole other story, but what is clear is that an archive, any archive, inhabits, via its commitment to cultural continuity, a meeting point of collective sanity on the one hand, and individual madness on the other, providing a necessary credential for the task. True archiving requires marrying the sense of the first to the sense of the second in order to function most effectively.

And it being in the nature of obsession to be forever unfulfilled, archives will continue as long as there is no physical or political disaster to disrupt their process of accumulation. (I have mourned the loss of the Library at Alexandria since first hearing about it as a child. In my mind, the fire might have been a necessary wisdom it annihilated tearing a gap in all our tomorrows. We can now add to the roster of irreparable loss the burning of the Library at Sarajevo.)

An unexpected exception to the hazards of obsessive accretion might be seen in the collection of notes of archaeologists, usually one notebook per sack of "finds." A straightforward relation between find and account, rigorously kept. I've written elsewhere of my encounter with Sandy McGillivray, a woman with a Cambridge patina in charge of the Villa Ariadne (the Iraklion outpost of the British School at Athens affectionately nicknamed "The Taverna"), just up the road from Knossos.

It was in the early 1980s and travelling to Crete I had agreed to serve as courier from the main British quarters, reducing the waiting period for letters from home and last month's copies of the *Times*.

Sandy, extraordinarily, had obtained permission to re-strew the contents of the great Evans' archive in the nearby Museum Ariadne which had been closed to the public for so long that strange xenophobic rumours attached themselves to every visitor. Using more tables than was possible in the world made available to Evans, Sandy was able to lay out and connect the fragments of metal, ceramic, and stone differently from his distinguished predecessor—an approach that generated a Velikovskyan-like meaning—reconfiguring en route our conventional understandings of the archaeological time period. He had invented from his juxtapositions. Grounded in evidence, the notebooks nevertheless opened up a major shift of received ideas, a re-reading of the archive in this instance instigating change.

(*End of parenthesis*)



strand two

At the *Kaiserliches Hofmobiliendepot*/ The “Aryanized Furniture” collection and archive

*It is rarely in the nature of turning points to announce themselves to the life being turned....Although I have no visual memory of anything preceding the scenes of my English childhood, there is the remembered sound of the way my mother all her life spoke the name Vienna, invoking a psychic amalgam of love, longing, legend. And loss. . . .**

*From “A Narrative of Absence and Return,” Vera Frenkel, 1999, unpublished catalogue text posted at <http://www.zaesuren.de>, with permission of the Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna.

The renovations of the *Kaiserliches Hofmobiliendepot* were not quite finished, less, despite certain galleries being still under wraps, the building that housed the Imperial Furniture Collection of the Habsburgs was newly re-opened to the public.

We had special permission to enter the backstage storage areas where were stored the pieces of so-called Aryanized furniture stolen during the expropriation of the Nazis of approximately 70,000 Viennese homes during the *Anschluss*, their contents dispersed among the party faithful. Five years ago or so, responding to international pressure half a century late, there had been a government call for the return of such items. After soliciting the stolen objects, the Austrian government announced that they would be inventoried here at the Imperial Furniture Museum. From their dispersal throughout the offices and the households of the occupying forces and of their successors, the remnants nobody wanted finally came limping in. We were about to see some of what had been returned.

After undergoing certain security measures, we—Professor X, accompanied by Herr Z, the tall blond art historian who worked with these items, and I—we were permitted to pass through three sets of locked double doors into a long and narrow space cut off from all sounds of the museum. No one could possibly find us there.

Some days earlier, elsewhere, Herr Z had shown me the opening pages of a detailed, inches-thick inventory he had referred to as the *Aryanized Furniture*, a bound volume featuring each retrieved item carefully photographed, numbered, and annotated, then photocopied on A4 sheets and the pages bound together.



after seeing these pages and hearing Herr Z reminisce with pride and a certain tenderness about his past five years' work researching the provenance of the objects recorded there, I still hadn't known quite what to expect.

Ushered past the crowded galleries en route to this hidden space, I had caught glimpses of some of the approximately 600,000 objects attesting to the wealth and workings of the Habsburg Empire. But now we found ourselves in a private realm, standing in the presence of an accumulation of broken bits and pieces of furniture and household goods from which emanated such pathos and dread that I had to remind myself to breathe. Here, in this long and narrow space, hidden from the world, were the last banal shreds of the Viennese apartments expropriated fifty-five years earlier.

There were in fact three guides involved with that Monday morning visit. In addition to the dark-haired museology professor and his blond associate, we were joined by Frau Doktor M, the Museum's chief curator, the one who would have to decide what might become of these objects

The search for the owners of these items having been concluded, Dr M was faced with a challenge. Enough of rummaging in the either misunderstood or sordid (depending on your viewpoint) past. The storage space was needed. There was pressure from funders to bring an end to the matter. Options being discussed ranged from destroying these poor traces of former lives, to displaying them as an exhibition in the museum's newest galleries.

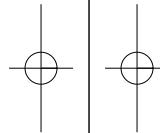
Together, Herr Z and Fr Dr M had assembled in archive form whatever data they

could find. They were both proud and protective of their work. While my interest in this archive was appreciated, it had been made quite clear at our previous meeting that the book was not available for distribution and never would be. Not even a single photocopy would they permit. It must suffice to examine a few pages of its presence. I might, however, visit the furniture depot if I wished, before the objects were disposed of.

And so here we were. . . .

I had expected thousands of items. What I saw around me were perhaps a few hundred or eighty everyday objects, wrenched out of their original settings, "borrowed" a generation or two, and now dumped here for convenience. In this airless, dark chamber, on the private side of a long wall (which supported on its public side a dozen or so luxurious, beautifully reconstructed Biedermeier rooms) was a pile of broken lamps, worn rugs, scratched and dented end-tables, a damaged book-case, chairs missing an arm or a leg, chipped vases, and various fragments. A few of these items had labels with numbers and a family name scrawled in ink. A marker on a torn half-sheet of paper. Workmen in blue overalls moved things this way and that, stacking the objects so they would take up less room.

With some situations, the toxins are so embedded in the soil of the dilemma that resolution is unattainable. I understood that once this day was over and the sets of doors closed behind me, I would not be permitted to see either the objects or the documentation again. The *Aryanized Furniture Archive* would live on somewhere; a job well done.



strand three

Anlaufstelle für jüdische NS-Verfolgte in und aus Österreich:

Holocaust Victims' Support and Information Centre, Austria and Abroad

*Soon, the packing is completed. There's a sudden startling encounter with a young photographer, hired by a family friend to document the flat discreetly before all disappears. A last look out of the study window. A glance around the empty rooms. Doors open and then close one more time. First the apartment door, then footsteps and the scraping down the stairs of whatever remaining boxes or valises the Freuds will take with them.... Then the downstairs latch, the creak of the hinges, the final glance up at the windows on the Berggasse side, and the Freuds are in flight....**

*From "A Narrative of Absence and Return," Vera Frenkel, 1999, unpublished catalogue text posted at <http://www.zaesuren.de>, with permission of the Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna.

The taxi driver didn't recognize the name of the street. Thinking my pronunciation might be at fault, I showed him the letter. My companion, Herr Z, said something quickly in German. A momentary blankness crossed the driver's face. "Ja," he said, handing back the document and adjusting his cap.

The car swung around. In minutes—the address was after all known to him—he pulled up at the edge of a cobble-stoned enclave chained against traffic.

The man beside me spoke again. He knew a route that might get us close to the building. The driver shrugged. The car lurched forward, turned left, then left again and we found ourselves beside an open square across from a large warehouse building bathed in a plaster-dust haze, sign of the flux and fuss of renovation. An unlikely setting for fragile memories, I thought, as we crossed the square past the construction debris, old and new, and circled the perimeter of the building for a way in. We were already late and Frau Doktor G was waiting.

The high-ceilinged office, tucked in a far corner of the second floor, was spotlessly freshly painted white. I remember a vase of deep pink flowers, but can't remember if we'd brought them or they were already there. Vast windows framed the courtyard square on one side—had she seen us coming?—and on the other, a street lined with houses and shops, some with signs in German and Hebrew, the morning morning on the rooftops beyond.



I had come to introduce Herr Z, the young scholar who at the *Kaiserliches Hofmobiliendepot* across town on the Andreasgasse had helped to make an inventory of the so-called Aryanized furniture that had survived.

Looking at the art historian sitting at her worktable, a petite, rather beautiful woman whose vision this new archive would realize, I wondered if this meeting was really such a good idea. With all his empathy, Herr Z was a tourist in her world, and something in her manner suggested that Fr Dr G saw this. But she was faultlessly courteous and her eyes large, expressive, generously lashed, gazed at us without reproach. When she spoke it was only to say quietly that she had another meeting in half an hour, and to ask what she could do for us.

"Everything's still in boxes," she said, explaining the surrounding chaos; they'd just moved: "Except these. . .," pointing to two rows of alphabetized and dated file binders on a high shelf unit just outside her office door. Later, on our way out, she would place a forefinger gently on the spine of the first volume, touching the date 1900, "Our oldest client. The year he was born," she said, her voice soft. "We hope he will live long enough for us to help him. . . ."

This was all taking place too early in the morning for me. I'm not good at rising before dawn, but our only option was to see Fr Dr G for half an hour before her work day began, and it had seemed to me important that before leaving Vienna next

day, I must try to wrest some whiff of sanity from what I was discovering of current confusions. "Strategic incompetence," was how the Tavistock-trained Roland Forrester, a student of Donald Winnicott, might have described Austria's sixteen commissions of inquiry, each undermining the other and succeeding, tentatively, it seemed, to avoid carrying out a single genuine act of restitution.

I recalled that it was in November, 1996, while installing a work at the G (Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst) in Bremen, that I had heard about a young art historian, a Frau Doktor G, who was helping to organize the Mauerbach Art Sale, the famous public sale that year of the stolen art that had been in possession of the Austrian government, much of it stored in the Schloss Mauerbach since World War II. Two years later, in Vienna, I heard about her again. She had recently undertaken to open an agency or bureau to assist diasporic Austrians with their reclamation of property. Whether finding family snapshots or pianos, insurance policies or lost documents, she was making it her task to clear paths for claimants through the obstacles of bureaucratic barriers of cumulative denial, while building twin archives, one of requests for restitution, and one documenting items known to have survived.

It had seemed to me that Herr Z's *Hofmobiliendepot* project and Dr G's new agency and Information Centre had something to offer each other.

Our three-way conversation took place well before the election that brought to power the smiling and rabid Joerg Haider, but already, partly as a result of the North American art magazine probes, Austria's stance on matters of restitution had come under world scrutiny, resulting in various forms of political stagecraft. For them the contradictory mesh of aforementioned commissions of inquiry, the administrative bonds impenetrable.

I had met some of the commissioners and had listened to their tales of bureaucratic entanglement. I saw the moral-political gridlock in which they were trapped. Imposed by overlapping arenas of power, contradictory checks and balances, and a *dos-y-dos* between stated and unconscious desires, there was no recourse for any part but irony. In that spirit, one of them kindly mapped out the whole structure for me on pastel paper ovals.

Once alerted to this complex paralysis, I could perceive only one small point of access. Here, at daybreak, in this unfinished office, surrounded by paint fumes and construction noises, we were at that point.

As mentioned, Herr Z had been one of those researching the provenance of the broken bits and pieces of furniture for which the *Hofmobiliendepot* had assumed responsibility. In five years of steady investigation he had unearthed the names of only eight families. Their descendents, if there were any, were scattered all over the world, but he had in the process developed an attachment to their histories. The furniture returned to the public domain fifty years later by beneficiaries of those to whom the furniture had originally been distributed were not likely to be in the best of health, and their rightful owners were long dead, but a relative might be persuaded to pay the shipping and insurance costs in order to retrieve this or that broken lamp or moth-eaten rug, or wobbly bookcase (better, I supposed, than paying the astronomical sum of storage fees said to be charged to claimants retrieving stolen artworks).



A year later, Herr Z, a thoughtful and sensitive man, frustrated at having been unable to find owners of the items for which he'd been tracing provenance, thought of putting these fragments of long-destroyed households on display. He had seemingly been discouraged from this notion by interested others. Dr. G had said privately to me, "The furniture is not theirs to display. It belongs to the people from whom it was stolen. It isn't material for spectacle."

He decided instead on large "*kunstlerische Aufnahmen*" (artistic photographs) of these last traces of Vienna's expropriated apartments. Hosted by the *Kaiserliche Hofmobiliendepot*, the photographs would be installed in the heart of the museum, among the Habsburg crowns, cradles, calculating devices, and coffins, reportedly to great acclaim: Serious attempts at restitution were being made, it was thought. Herr Z was at last "bravely working through" the implications and impact of its Nazi and Socialist history.

Plus there was that massive archive, assembled by Herr Z and the Chief Archivist, each item documented via colour photocopies, with appended descriptions and provenance notes. A large hard cover exhibition catalogue appeared in due course, featuring each bruised and broken object marked with its number, like the forearm of a clock yesteryear. Staff members from both the Sigmund Freud Museum and the *Anlaufstelle für jüdische NS-Verfolgte* (home of the Restitution archive) attended the grand opening.

But rising early that last Vienna morning a year earlier wasn't a total waste. For Dr. G had an archive of inquiries. Herr Z had his archive of unclaimed objects. My work on Third Reich *Kunstraub* (art theft) for the Freud Museum was under way. One way or another, issues of migration and exile had shaped the infrastructure of all our activities. Local mores might prevent a native from taking that short taxi-ride, but it made sense that these two researchers should meet. An unassuming stranger from Canada with a penchant for making introductions could be forgiven for a certain New World naïveté.

Later still, in conversation with Frau Dr. G, I learn that three more previously unidentified items of Aryanized furniture have been placed. Her agency, now responding to world-wide inquiries, has moved to larger premises and then to a new staff. The so-called Freedom Party in the meantime has cut budgets throughout the cultural sector by 30%, with the promise of slashing another 20% the following year. Perhaps fittingly, *Body Missing* would be installed at the Sigmund Freud Museum in London instead of the wonderful old Vienna apartment; in the rooms where the exiled analyst had finished writing *Moses and Monotheism*, had continued his journal he'd started in 1929 (*Chronik Kürzeste Tagebuch*), adding a sentence each day to the sheaf of unbound papers kept on his desk: the Hampstead house where distinguished visitors from all over the world had come to pay their respects to where he had died.

Coda

Herr Z is now a curator, I believe. Professor X, my thoughtful host, a few more silver threads edging his hair, is still thinking it all through. Frau Doktor G has left the archive she founded and is writing a book on issues related to her work there.

I returned to Vienna two years later to install *Body Missing* at the Georg Kargl Gallery, arriving in the middle of public perturbation regarding an archive of 5,600 photographic negatives that had just been discovered in a Hofburg filing cabinet, each negative documenting a stolen artwork. Vienna, a city said to be prone to suspicion and gossip on occasion, willingly gave itself over to the speculation that the archive had been known in certain quarters all along, and its discovery only now disclosed; a notion that was given credence by the accounts of several people each of whom claimed to have been the first to find it.

At the Hofburg to discuss the newly discovered treasure, those I met included the tall, silver-haired, slightly eccentric Dr. Ernst Bacher, a former politician recently given responsibility for all matters pertaining to Austrian “misappropriated artworks” and other issues of restitution. The member of the group whose interest and commitment most moved me was the chief historian and former bicycle salesman, Dr. Robert Holzbauer (“... For historians to find work is sometimes difficult in Austria,” he said modestly. “One learns to do other things to live.”) He had continued his scholarly work throughout, and was now responsible for a remarkable network of archives housed under the roof at this seat of power.

Yet whatever his day job required, Dr. Holzbauer had still managed to find energy to create a web archive (<http://members.aon.at/robert.holzbauer/archiv.htm>), about the many archives in his care plus others of his own interest. From his site, for example, one can access the City Archive of Linz, the town where Hitler had to realize his obsessive desire to build an art museum for the 6,000 or so stolen artworks accumulated there for the Sonderauftrag Linz and stored in the Alt Aussee saltmines nearby. And here again (<http://www.linz.at/archiv/#>) was the archive where much of the research for the very project which had taken me to Vienna (<http://www.yorku.ca/BodyMissing>) had been done.

“Only connect?” When everything connects, the challenge is to follow the strands to where they lead and to accept what they say and where they take you.

A few minutes ago, I revisited the Holzbauer site for the first time in some months. I came across a link to an exhibition at the Depot of Movables and Material (a seemingly literal and secularized translation of the *Kaiserliches Hofmobiliendepot* previously known as the Imperial War Museum). The advertised exhibition (http://www.iff.ac.at/inventarisiert/ausstellung3_en.html) features images of the so-called Aryanized furniture I had seen, each piece now with its number, and a general text which refers to pieces which are “no longer available.” Lines from a poem of Cavafy come to mind; something about sticks of furniture turning up somewhere, but still existing in their new, if alien, milieu. Lines that don’t apply here.

I don’t know what has happened to those fragments of life I saw at the Imperial Furniture Museum. Not at the archive.

