

Vienna–London Passage to Safety (2017): The Portrait-Photographer as Secondary Witness in Post-Anschluss Émigré Narratives

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In the opening pages of *Vienna–London Passage to Safety: Emigré Portraits in Photographs and Words* (2017), documentary photographer Marion Trestler (b. 1955) describes the silences which prevailed in the Austria of her youth: ‘History stopped in 1912. There was no education on the Holocaust. I really knew very little about it.’¹ This all-prevailing silence lasted into the early years of her professional life as a lawyer in Vienna during the early 1980s.

This example of familial and institutionalized suppression of the Holocaust in Trestler’s early years, experienced as a silencing, is a commonly shared experience of the second-generation inheritors of these catastrophic events, not only of the children of survivors, but also — as Marianne Hirsch and others have argued — of the children of witnesses, perpetrators and the wider community.² In Trestler’s case it has led to a work of ‘retrospective witnessing by adoption’, the inscription and documentation of the memories of Austrian Jewish émigrés who were directly involved in these events.³

Trestler has lived in London for over thirty years. During this time, she gradually became a portrait photographer and this process — of accumulating detail, depth of understanding and the confidence of her subjects, like a patient archivist — now inflects her photographic work. The project to be discussed

¹ ‘Marion Trestler in Conversation with Diane V. Silverthorne’, in *Vienna–London Passage to Safety: Emigré Portraits in Photographs and Words*, ed. by Marion Trestler (Vienna, 2017), pp. 13–17. I acknowledge here the contributions of the twenty-one émigrés featured in the book, the fourteen contributors of biographical essays. My thanks are due to Marion Trestler for the confidence she showed in giving me access to the materials at an early stage, as well as for her personal account of this project.

² Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames Photography Narrative and Postmemory*, (Cambridge, MA, 1997); see also Anne Karpf, ‘Chain of Testimony: The Holocaust Researcher as Surrogate Witness’, in *Representing Auschwitz at the Margins of Testimony*, ed. by Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams (New York, 2013), pp. 85–103.

³ Marianne Hirsch, ‘Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (2001), 5–37 (p. 10), citing Geoffrey Hartmann.

here, Trestler's second study of Austrian émigrés, is a unique collection of intimate portraits made up of biographical essays by fourteen contributors, first-person commentary, family photographs and Trestler's photographic portraiture.⁴ The book tells the stories of twenty-one Austrian Jewish refugees who arrived in Britain in the inter-war period. All of them fled Austria before or at the time of the 'Anschluss', Austria's absorption into Nazi Germany, which took place in March 1938.⁵ Eleven of the twenty-one came to Britain under the auspices of the Kindertransport. This mass transport system organized by the Jewish Refugee Committee, the Central British Fund for German Jewry, and supported by the British Jewish community and other organizations (such as the Christian Council for Refugees), allowed around 10,000 Jewish children out of Nazi Germany and its annexed territories in Austria and the former Czechoslovakia to come to the UK without their parents. The first train from Vienna left on 10 December 1938 carrying 600 children. Altogether 2,844 Jewish children were able to leave Austria in this way.⁶

That most of Trestler's subjects, in their eighties and nineties, are or were nearing the end of their lives was the catalyst for personal storytelling, in some cases for breaking a virtual silence which surrounded their own past experiences of forced emigration for the first time. The emphasis throughout the book is on individual accounts of lives ordinary and less ordinary, the remembered life before in Austria, and after in Britain. The accounts resist a dramatic retelling of tragedy and survival to reveal instead, through layers of personal and collective memory, prismatic accounts of displacement, issues of contested and new identities, diverse experiences of rejection and acceptance, and the often unstable relationship with both the nation of birth and the nation of adoption. Close reading of the narrative elements of the book reveals these and other threads and similarities between very singular and different people. For example, several of the protagonists refer to their complicated and conflicted relationship with their language of birth, sometimes abandoned, often longed for. Stella Rotenberg (1915–2013), 'poet in exile', whose youthful photograph from her school identity card appears on the cover, declared in a poem titled 'Rückkehr' [Return] that she 'would go back through the jaws of

⁴ Marion Trestler, *Destination UK, Women Immigrants from Post-War Austria, Immigrantinnen Aus dem Nachkriegösterreich* (Vienna, 2013).

⁵ Steven Beller and Frank Trommler, 'Austrian Writers Confront the Past 1945–2000: An Introduction', *New German Critique*, 93 (2004), 3–18; Erika Bourignon, 'Vienna and Memory: Anthropology and Experience', *Ethos*, 24.2 (1998), 374–87, for perspectives on the Anschluss and Austrian responses contemporaneously and post-1945.

⁶ Andrea Hammel and Bea Leakow (eds), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938–9: New Perspectives* (Amsterdam, 2012); Vera K. Fast, *Children's Exodus: History of the Kindertransport* (New York, 2011); see also The Wiener Library for the Study of Holocaust and Genocide, London, for an extensive online bibliography and archive on this subject, <<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/>> [accessed 1 September 2018].

Hell just to hear the sound of my mother tongue again'.⁷ Her black-and-white photographic portrait, a close-up study of her face, exposes the essential nature of 'the unique being', in calm repose.⁸ These two images bring the viewer into an intimate position with Stella's elderly and youthful selves, traversing the time and space of nearly one hundred years of history, memory and the horrors of the Shoah.

The first public exposure of Trestler's 'documentary portraiture', as she describes her work, took place in London in August 2017 as the material for a paper and an exhibit at the 'Austria in Transit' conference at King's College. The portraits were displayed on a temporary framework at the entrance to the conference room throughout the proceedings. It is unusual for an academic conference to host an artist's own subjects at the same event. In this case, visitors to the conference included Vienna-born George Vulkan, and Andrea Rauter, daughter of émigré Claire Rauter née Kösten (1924–2011), an eminent educator, who is profiled in Trestler's book in a joint interview with her brother, Freddy Kosten (b. 1928). Among other programmed events which considered urgent, contemporary and now critical events of displacement and forced immigration, the presence of the living protagonists bridged the ordinarily unbridgeable distance between the events leading to 1938 and immediately after, creating for the participants and audience members, in a quiet and unspectacular way, 'an intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance'.⁹

Trestler's portraits have also been the subject of two exhibitions, at the Museum für das Kind, Vienna, in November 2017, to mark the publication of the book by SYNEMA, and at the Austrian Cultural Forum (ACF), London, in March 2018, to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the Anschluss. Subjects profiled in the book attended both events. A second event in April 2018 at the ACF showed the accompanying fifty-minute film made by Marion and Christoph Trestler. This now exists digitally in the expanded archival space of the internet, the impact of which, in the context of memory studies, has yet to be fully evaluated.¹⁰ Trestler's work on this subject is no ordinary project of documentation in its richness and depth of detail, the continuities and discontinuities of lives lived in many ways, revealed through this painstaking archive. As Hirsch acknowledges in her writings on postmemory, 'any gathering

⁷ Trestler, *Vienna–London*, p. 192.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by R. Howard (London, 2000), p. 70, writing on the photograph portraits of his mother.

⁹ Hirsch, 'Surviving Images', p. 10; see also Elke Heckner, 'Whose Trauma Is It? Identification and Secondary Witnessing in the Age of Postmemory', in *Visualising the Holocaust, Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. by David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester, NY, 2008), pp. 62–85 (p. 68), citing Hirsch.

¹⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York, 2012), pp. 227–50, for a discussion of postmemory, the internet and archival practices. Also see 'Vienna — London Passage to Safety', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76Yr7maO-iA>> [accessed 16 September 2018].

of photographs is a community [...]. It is in this spirit that artists assume the work of collectors, archivists and curators, revealing the archive as a site of creative artistic production, not just reproduction.¹¹

This article will explore the ethical positions of witnessing and secondary witnessing and specifically the role of the artist of the postmemory generation, using theories which have emerged in cultural memory discourse emanating from Holocaust studies, notably in the writings of Marianne Hirsch.¹² Hirsch's early vivid characterization of postmemory, the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first, yet which is imagined and remembered as theirs, does not only apply to children of survivors.¹³ The haunting can be passed from one generation to the next, the transgenerational consequence of suppression and silence.¹⁴ The family photograph has a talismanic power in this respect. It plays a role in this space somewhere between the veracity of the archive, that which is rightly submissible, and the knowledge that this person stood there, 'irrefutably present', once, in that place.¹⁵

I will argue that the artist, in this case Marion Trestler, who began with the specific purpose of portrait photography with a narrative intent, makes manifest the role of 'secondary witness' characterized by Dominick LaCapra and others, drawing out, as Eve Karpf writes, 'a chain of testimony in which they act as a medium for the transmission of first-hand accounts to future generations for whom the Holocaust will be nothing but history'.¹⁶ Trestler made repeated visits to her subjects, starting deep and personal dialogues which were sustained throughout the eight years of the project's life, thus entering into 'a privileged mode of access to the past and its traumatic occurrences', qualities which LaCapra ascribes to the role of secondary witness.¹⁷ Testimony 'provides insight into lived experiences and its transmission in language and gesture'.¹⁸

¹¹ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 229.

¹² Marianne Hirsch, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy', in *Acts of Memory Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH, 1999), pp. 3–23.

¹³ Hirsch, 'Surviving Images', p. 9.

¹⁴ See for example Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA, 2005); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, 2001); Ernst Van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* (Stanford, CA, 1998), on trauma, silence and silencing; Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London, 1994), for what is repressed and what expressed in a culture of memorialization. See Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psycho-analysis*, trans. by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago, 1994), particularly pp. 171–87 on transgenerational 'haunting'.

¹⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 77.

¹⁶ Eve Karpf, 'Chain of Testimony, the Holocaust Researcher as Surrogate Witness', in *Representing Auschwitz at the Margins of Testimony*, ed. by Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams (New York and London, 2013), pp. 85–103 (p. 87), after Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

¹⁷ LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

The secondary witness, 'through a labour of listening and attending', exposes the self to 'empathic understanding'.¹⁹ This involves an attempt to put oneself in the other's position, without taking the other's place. The camera brings the photographer into intimate proximity with the subject. It also intervenes between the two, mechanically distancing subject and portraitist. This process is one of objective documentation and of subjectivity. The book *Vienna-London Passage to Safety* fulfils both these roles.

I

Vienna-London Passage to Safety is an integrated, multi-layered document, crossing the borders and interstices between memory, narrative, testimony and history. Each of the twenty-one accounts consists of three main elements: Trestler's photographic portrait, a biographical essay and additional images of other materials, mainly photographs, drawn from family albums and archives. Trestler's conversations and informal interviews act as palimpsests to the biographical essays and the biographical notes written by Trestler and set as back-matter in the book. They add the colour and texture which enriched the photographic process.

The essays were written by contributors drawn from diverse disciplines and backgrounds — history, art history, exile studies, fiction and documentary writing, psychotherapy, music, film, political studies, education, performance, theatre, publishing and the professional services.²⁰ All have been engaged with Trestler's project and independently with some of the subjects of the book for some years. Each profile is introduced by a short and telling epithet, excerpt or quotation drawn directly from the interview materials. Of the twenty-one, only Marianne Gorge, who spent most of her life in the service of disabled children, chose to write her own essay, entitled simply 'My Life Story'. The tone and content throughout the collection is distinguished by just such a lack of artifice or pretension. It thus serves as 'a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the broad transfer and availability of individual and familial remembrance', in Hirsch's words.²¹

Family photographs are carefully displayed on otherwise empty pages in each chapter. Many of the parents, siblings and other family members pictured before 1938 did not survive. Such photographs 'play as media of postmemory', clarifying the connections between 'familial' and 'affiliative' postmemory,

¹⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), p. 198, after Lawrence Langer.

²⁰ The contributors were Gerald Davidson, Gert Dressel, Alarys Gibson, Christine Kanzler, John Landaw, Elisabeth Lebensaft, Brigitte Mayr, Gillian Moore MBE, Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, Michael Omasta, Edith Petschnigg, Peter Pirker, Axel Reiserer, Christoph Trestler and Marion Trestler. For brief biographies, see Trestler, *Vienna-London*, pp. 223–24.

²¹ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 35.

Hirsch's distinctions which characterize the intergenerational transmission of memory, not only within the family but also the wider community.²² Conventional in appearance, they nevertheless function as 'ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past'.²³ In their turn, these images place an ethical responsibility on the readers of the book, a reminder that we are also enjoined as secondary witnesses to the wider historic events which lie behind the life stories, the space on the otherwise blank pages denoting silences left in their wake.

II

There are therefore several forms of portraiture included within the covers of Trestler's book, both visual and narrative: a complex, layered form of the art which deserves some brief further analysis. Portraiture is an ancient and ubiquitous form. A vast category, it is unique among the genres of art in that it is the only one which requires the presence of the subject of the portrait and the direct involvement of the artist with the subject in the process of its making.²⁴ Portraiture's association with mimesis — copying and imitation — gave it a lower status than other genres until the early twentieth century (with some singular exceptions). Yet, as Shearer West comments, 'the imaginative and interpretative aspects of portraiture make it resistant to documentary reductivism'.²⁵ The enduring fascination with portraiture is captured in this singular paradox. Acknowledging the distinction between painting and photography as well as the documentary attributes of photographic portraits and the 'artist-photographer', Cynthia Freeland describes this paradox as common to both media, as a conflict 'between the revelatory and the expressive'.²⁶ Photographic portraiture as opposed to painting has been credited with superior powers of representation, offering 'a special means of affording contact with the sitter'.²⁷ As the writings of Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag have established, uniquely the photographic portrait offers a trace of the living person, as 'having been there'.²⁸ This exerts the photographic portrait's magical affect. George Santayana in 'The Photograph and Mental Image' (1923) claimed that photography 'was employed to preserve those mental images we

²² Ibid., p. 22.

²³ Ibid., p. 36. For a materialist reading of haunting by 'the ghosts of the past', see Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York, 1994).

²⁴ Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 11–13.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁶ Cynthia Freeland, 'Portraits in Painting and Photography', *Philosophical Studies* online (2007), 95–109 (p. 95), <<https://search-proquest-om.arts.idm.oclc.org/docview/196617045?pq-origsite=360link&https://search.proquest.com/artshumanities/accountid=10342>> [accessed 6 August 2018].

²⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

²⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 85.

most dislike to lose, the images of familiar faces [...] a welcome salve to keep those precious things a little longer in the world'.²⁹ The family photograph is irretrievably bound up with the experience of postmemory. Yet distinctions must be made between the family photograph, taken from the album archives, and Trestler's practice as portraitist.

Trestler deliberately does not impose a unified presentation style on her subjects. They each inhabit their own lives, each portrait a singular statement of likeness, personality, character and 'air', Barthes's term for the unquantifiable, unrepeatable, precious expression or 'look'.³⁰ Barthes used the word, 'lacking anything better, for the expression of truth'.³¹ In this respect, Trestler took up a theme which was pre-determined: the age of her subjects, collectively pre-defined as a group by their common points of departure from Austria. 'Lateness' in art is more usually associated with the progenitor of late or last works celebrated in the essays of Adorno and Edward Said, *On Late Style*.³² These explore the idea that late works are not always serene and transcendent but are often unresolved and contradictory. This characterization of lateness permeates Trestler's book. 'Lateness [...] is a kind of self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable, coming after it, and surviving beyond it', wrote Said: 'One cannot transcend or lift oneself out of lateness, one can only deepen lateness'.³³ Trestler's images communicate both 'timeliness and lateness'; the stories they tell, the interrogation of histories communicate this paradox.³⁴ None of the individual sections exceeds five pages or so, yet the content is so telling that each inimitably 'deepen[s] lateness'.

Trestler made use of colour or black-and-white, depending on what seemed the appropriate medium for each subject at that time. Some portray the whole figure, in their own home; some bring us into an intimate relationship with a dramatic close-up of faces gracious in and softened by old age. In all cases, Trestler found opportunities to explore the full expressive possibilities in representing the complexity of ageing facial features.³⁵ Three of the subjects are represented in double portraits: academic Alice Teichova with her husband, émigré and historian Mikuláš Teich; Trata Maria Drescha, artist, with her mother, Lisa, both of whom arrived on the Kindertransport; Otto Deutsch with his cousin Alfred Kessler, both also 'Kinder'. T. Scarlett Epstein, the anthropologist, is pictured on an upturned boat on a pebble beach in Hove, a solitary figure, rather distanced from the viewer by the wide expanse of landscape, a symphony in monotones, the flat sea behind her stretching to a

²⁹ Santayana (1923), in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1806 to the Present* (New York, 1981), p. 260, cited by Freeland, 'Portraits in Painting and Photography', p. 103.

³⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 107.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³² Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (London, 2007).

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16 and 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3, the title of Chapter One.

³⁵ West, *Portraiture*, p. 142.

grey horizon. A seagull floats above, a cipher in the sky. This is a most telling setting for this subject who undertook an odyssey across not one but many seas, arriving in England via Yugoslavia, Albania, Italy and Germany. The vivid portrait of Alice Anson (1924–2016), ‘inspired to work in charities’, is cropped to frame. She is seated at home in her red velvet armchair: the image bursts with energy, colour and light. Alice was reunited with her parents in 1944. She was still involved with Rape Crisis at the age of ninety-one. There is no doubt that some of the portraits are celebratory, if not redemptive.

The importance of culture to lives lived to the full is common to most of the portraits, exemplified in Marianne Gorge’s prefatory quote: ‘I experience music and art as a much greater reality than cooking and household duties.’ She is shown in 2010 on a rough-hewn bench under an ancient tree in the grounds of The Sheiling, Ringwood, a Rudolf Steiner inspired institution. Her elfin gaze and slight figure, firmly planted beneath the spreading branches, appear as the living embodiment of her own way of life, which she described as ‘a magic way of transforming matter, of spiritualising it’, even as regards the most repetitive tasks she undertook in the care of underprivileged children. The celebrated musician, Joseph Horowitz, is pictured erect and besuited, next to, and with his hand resting gently on his grand piano, a half-smile on his face. His String Quartet No. 5 (1969), a tribute to another celebrated refugee, the art historian Ernst Gombrich, is ‘dark and questioning [...] [It] stared directly into the abyss of Europe’s darkest hour’, in the words of musicologist Gillian Moore. It can fairly be described as a musical portrait of that time.³⁶

The images created by Trestler evoke in the main and at first glance a celebration of the elderly in reflective, sometimes joyful, occasionally melancholic mode. Each account weaves a different story, yet each one carries with it the same shadow of the past: the shock of the ‘Anschluss’ and its attendant deprivations, the traumatic caesura between children and parents, the haunting presence throughout life of the subsequent disappearances and deaths. The specificity of each study in portraiture challenges the homogenizing effect of historical factual accounts which focus on incommensurability to impart the enormity of such tragedies. Of the twenty-one portraits, that of Kindertransport survivor Ernest Schwarzbard cannot be described as celebratory. His portrait is entitled ‘Excerpts from a Damaged Life’.

III

Ernst Van Alphen has described the effect of trauma which cannot be assimilated or narrated as ‘failed experience’, events which cannot be expressed in any terms that language offers at that moment.³⁷ These words are particularly suggestive

³⁶ Gillian Moore, ‘From Captain Noah to the String Quartet No 5’, in Trestler, *Vienna–London*, pp. 176–77 (p. 177).

³⁷ Ernst Van Alphen, ‘Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, Trauma’, in *Acts of*

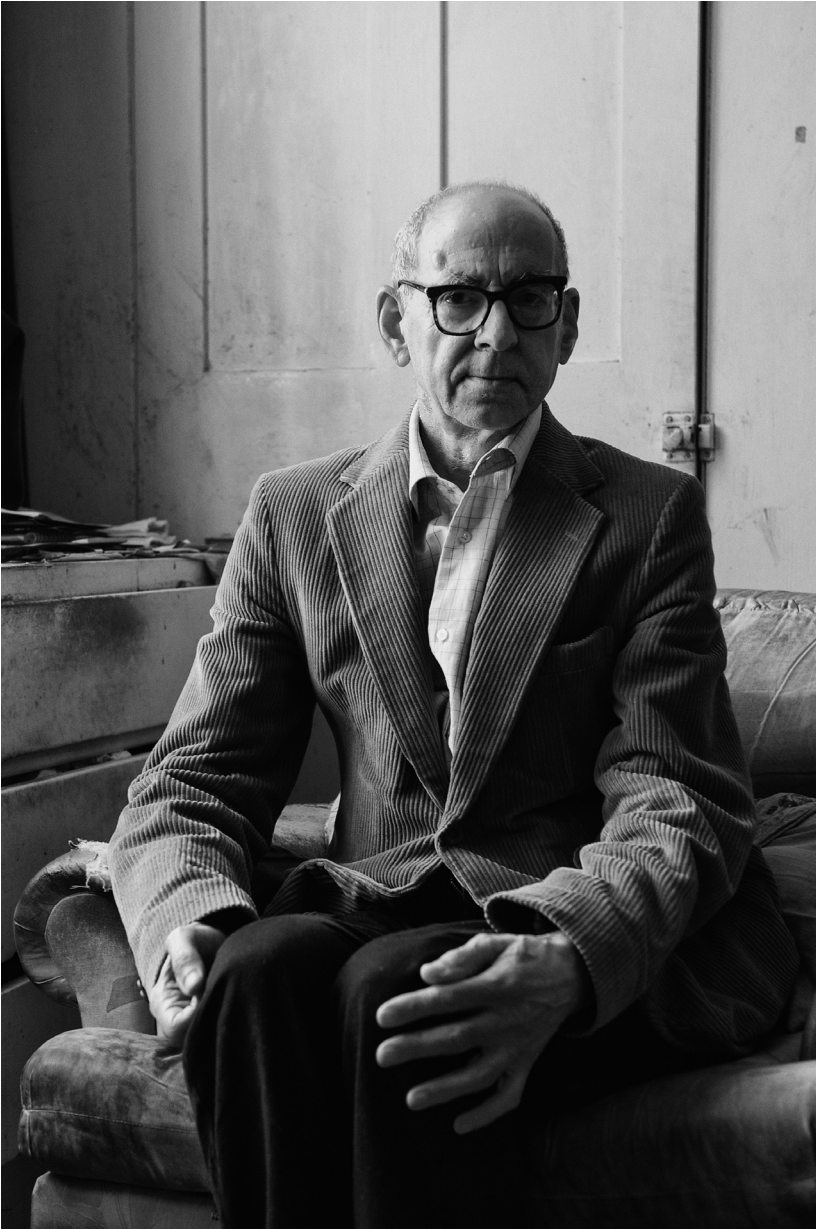


FIG. 1. Ernest Schwarzbard (black and white). © mariontrestler.com.

of Ernest's story as told by contributor Alex Reiserer and Trestler.³⁸ Ernest Schwarzbard (b. 1932) a modest and conflicted man, gazes out of the frame (fig. 1). He is photographed at home; he shows signs of wear and decrepitude. He has been captured at an angle which seems to suggest that he is moving out of the picture frame towards us. He was seven years old when he came to Britain from Vienna on one of the last Kindertransporte.

If he has any memory of the journey, it remains buried: 'It was dark, everything happened at night. The train left in the night. Everything was dark.'³⁹ Ernest dealt with the trauma of being uprooted and losing his parents and family who were murdered in the camps by withdrawing into himself. He says that he found himself 'all alone together with 200 others, but all the same completely alone'.⁴⁰ He had a few letters from his mother, then silence. Ernest stopped speaking in German almost as soon as he arrived, and only spoke English. 'Yes', Ernest said. 'German was gone, quite gone. Yes. With very few exceptions. I still knew, for example, a simple word such as dog or cat. Yes.'⁴¹ His memories, it seems, are part-memories, part-emanations of his experiences which 'erupt in flashes of imagery', 'in broken refrains', 'transmitted through the language of the body'.⁴² They are precisely 'the stuff of postmemory, of trauma and of its return'.⁴³

Reiserer's text tells us that Ernest has no telephone at home, nor does he own a mobile phone or use email. He is poor. He rents a bleak-looking room in a depressing part of London. His speech is halting; sometimes he talks in English, sometimes in German. Sometimes he will say nothing at all for minutes. He resists questioning, curiosity and compassion. He provides information about his Viennese roots and his memories of Lange Gasse 28, where he was born in 1932. He loves travelling through London on his Freedom Pass and he has very precise ideas on how to get where by public transport.⁴⁴ Ernest has only ever returned to Vienna as a visitor and speaks nostalgically of the Anker clock on the Anker Insurance Company building on the Hoher Markt; his 'mother always took [him] there to see the musical clock playing at midday'.⁴⁵

His glasses are broken. His clothes come from charity shops. The folds in his jacket, graphically and evocatively recorded here, suggest the body (or bodies)

Memory, pp. 24–38 (p. 26).

³⁸ Ernest Schwarzbard's photographic portrait is accompanied by two biographical 'portraits', by Axel Reiserer and Marion Trestler, respectively. See Trestler, *Vienna–London*, pp. 108–11 and pp. 112–13.

³⁹ Reiserer, quoted in Trestler, *Vienna–London*, p. 109.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 31, citing Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge, Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York, 2004), p. 193.

⁴³ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ Trestler, *Vienna–London*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

that inhabited the garment. In the nineteenth century, tailors and repairers called the wrinkles in the elbows and the sleeves of a jacket ‘memories’. Memories were thus inscribed by the poor within objects that were haunted by loss.⁴⁶ The image underlines the independent power of expression given to his hands, emerging from a deeper darkness.

Marion Trestler’s book opens with a gleaming double portrait of Alice Teichova, née Schwartz (1920–2015). She is photographed with her husband Mikuláš Teich (1918–2018). It is titled ‘What I really want is Knowledge’. As her *Guardian* obituary noted, Alice was ‘one of the leading economic historians of modern central Europe’.⁴⁷ She was also the first female Professor of Economic History at the University of East Anglia and remained so for the duration of her appointment. She noted that this was ‘very nice for her’, because it gave her the freedom to do far more than she might have been able to do as a Fellow at Girton College, Cambridge, where she made her entry into British academic life. This was an unusual trajectory for any girl born in 1920, but especially so given Alice’s upbringing: ‘There wasn’t much encouragement to study or learn in our family’, she noted.⁴⁸

The double portrait of Teichova and her husband, taken in 2011, is in black-and-white (fig. 2). It gives the effects of touch and touching in many ways. The couple are depicted in their closeness, bound together as inseparable. A compelling image, this study of intimacy in old age has a pleasing resonance with Rembrandt’s painting *The Jewish Bride* (c.1667) in its expression of physical and spiritual love. The mutual gaze of affection bridges the space that separates their faces, speaking of a reciprocity based on a shared history, the intensity of which perhaps no words could adequately convey. They are not quite mirror images of each other, but they share the same smile.

Hand gestures, the gentle clasp of Mikuláš’s hand on Alice’s shoulder, her hand resting on his thigh, establish more than just the relationship between the two. Photography has been likened to ‘words of light’, at the interface between history, memory, words and image.⁴⁹ Trestler has captured an intense white light which emanates from the image; it shines from the surface of the couple’s clothes, and the silver white of their hair. It seems to radiate a life-force, the body-and-soul duality of portraiture, a synthesis of external appearances and internal life.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Peter Stallybrass, ‘Marx’s Coat’, in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. by Patricia Spyer (London, 1998), pp. 184–207 (196).

⁴⁷ Richard J. Evans, ‘Alice Teichova Obituary’, *The Guardian*, 21 April 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/21/alice-teichova>> [accessed 16 September 2018].

⁴⁸ Alice Teichova, quoted by Gert Dressel, Trestler, *Vienna–London*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ After William Henry Fox Talbot (1839), see Eduardo de Cadava, *Words of Light Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), p. xvii.

⁵⁰ West, *Portraiture*, pp. 17, 34.



FIG. 2. Alice Teichova and Mikuláš Teich (black and white).
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Trata Maria Drescha (b. 1929), who describes herself as having ‘definitely the half-full glass temperament’,⁵¹ escaped from Vienna on the Kindertransport in March 1938. By a strange accident of fate, her mother was also able to accompany her to London. The double portrait was taken at her cottage in Bosham, Hampshire (fig. 3).⁵² Trestler has captured through atmosphere and composition the values which were characteristic of the early nineteenth-century Biedermeier period and its appreciation of the quiet pleasures of home and garden, which later so inflected the art and architecture of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, the period known by the epithet ‘Vienna 1900’, notably the new homes and gardens designed by the Wiener Werkstätte.⁵³ The garden as a bounded safe haven held a special place in Vienna’s modernist art and literature.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Trestler, *Vienna–London*, p. 66.

⁵² The original portrait is in full colour, see: <<http://www.mariontrestler.com/work/projects/Vienna-London-passage-safety>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁵³ The period encompassed by the birth of modernism in the arts, literature, music, architecture, the sciences and philosophy c.1890–1914 was frequently referred to as ‘Vienna 1900’. See *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, ed. by Steven Beller (Vienna, 2001). For views on the way ‘Vienna 1900’ has been foregrounded in Austria’s post-war narratives, see also Beller and Trommler, ‘Austrian Writers Confront the Past’, pp. 13–18.

⁵⁴ Diane V. Silverthorne, ‘Continuities and Discontinuities: The House and Garden as Rational and Psychological Space in Vienna’s Early Modernism’, in *FLOW: Interior Landscape and Architecture in the Era of Liquid Modernity*, ed. by Penny Sparke (New York, 2018), pp. 28–36.



The profusion of hollyhocks framing the figures is suggestive of Gustav Klimt's garden landscape paintings from that time.

Trata Maria took classes at Camberwell College of Arts with Victor Passmore and returned to Vienna in 1953 to study at the Vienna Academy. Her extraordinary life has included many years as a professional mosaicist, with commissions in Britain and Vienna, including the blue-and-gold mosaic over the entrance to the Church of the Holy Innocents and St John in Hammersmith, West London. Trata Maria's mosaic is reminiscent of one such commission undertaken by founding Vienna Secession artist Alfred Roller, for the fascia of the Breitenfelder Church in Vienna of a similar period.⁵⁵

The most distinctive characteristic of the full-colour portrait of Viennese Czech George Vulkan (1929–) is his gaze, addressed directly to the viewer (fig. 4).⁵⁶ It is unsmiling, or at least in repose, and if a gaze can look inwards as well as outwards, Trestler has captured both. After a few years of happy childhood, George experienced the excesses of the 'Anschluss', fleeing to Paris, and finally to England with his parents. His uncle returned to Austria to rescue the rest of the family, only to disappear, as did all those who had remained.⁵⁷ The gaze speaks wordlessly to the details and extent of the family losses Vulkan discovered on

⁵⁵ Diane Silverthorne, 'New Spaces of Art, Design and Performance: Alfred Roller and the Vienna Secession', unpublished PhD thesis (Royal College of Art, London, 2010), p. 79.

⁵⁶ The original portrait is in full colour, see: <<http://www.mariontrestler.com/work/projects/Vienna-London-passage-safety/>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁵⁷ Alarys Gibson, 'George Vulkan: A Viennese Czech', in Trestler, *Vienna-London*, pp. 142–47.

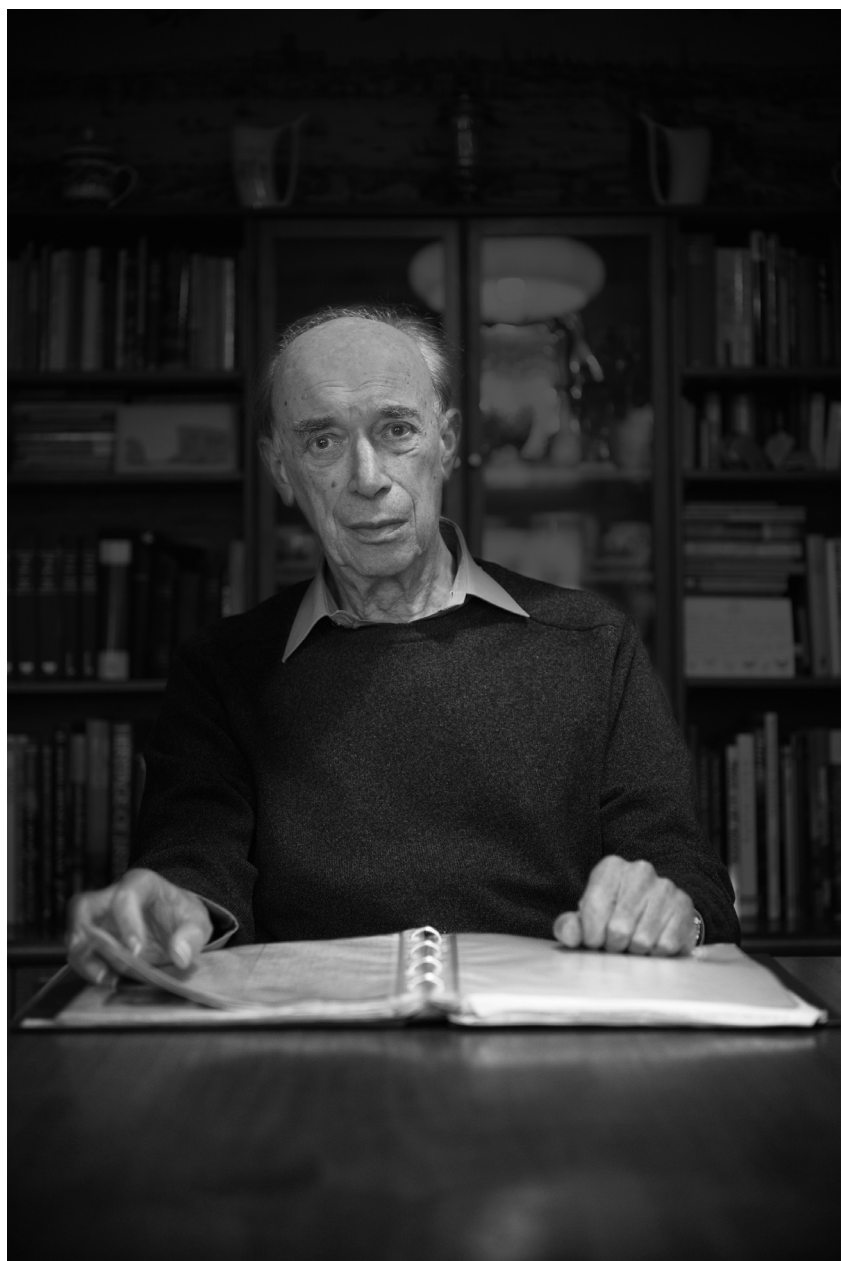


FIG. 4. George Vulkan (colour). © mariontrestler.com

the death of his father: the fate of his grandfather in Theresienstadt, and other members of his family in camps in Poland. The hands, resting on a file of the documents he found including his *Kleiner Abstammungs-Nachweis* [*Short Certificate of Descent*], a document issued to establish whether an individual was either pure 'Aryan', of mixed parentage or fully Jewish, are evidence of his devotion to not-forgetting. The table on which the folio is resting blurs into the foreground of the image. With Trestler's portrait of George Vulkan before the reader, the words of Michael André Bernstein, writing on the memorial photographic projections of artist Shimon Attie, seem particularly apt: 'To look at a photograph is to experience a certain sorrow at the sheer fact of loss and separation curiously mingled with the pleasure of recognising that what no longer exists, has been, if not restored to us, then at least memorialised for us, fixed in the stasis of an image now forever available for our gaze.'⁵⁸

George Vulkan's position, like that of all the other subjects of this book, complicates the scholarship on witnessing. They are not the born-after, but the born-before generation. They are the children of victims, survivors of forced flight and displacement of the migrant, not of the camps.⁵⁹ So much of this past, caught between memory and history, is an aporia. George compensates for losses not witnessed through initiatives of self-documentation, accounting for lives 'disappeared' by visiting schools and other institutions in London, and through an involvement in 'A Letter to the Stars', the initiative in Austria which brings the stories of 'last witnesses' of the Holocaust to high-school students.⁶⁰

IV

In conclusion, I provide some brief reflections on spaces for the enactment of secondary witnessing. The privately funded memorial museum Für das Kind — Museum zur Erinnerung [For the Child — Memorial Museum] opened in 2014 in the same building as Salon Bella Arte, Radetzkystraße 5 in Vienna's Third District.⁶¹ It houses what had previously been a travelling, one might say, homeless, exhibit of a series of twenty-three photographic records, standing in

⁵⁸ James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT, 2000), p. 72, quoting Michael André Bernstein, 'Shimon Attie: Images as Memory, Memory of Images', in Shimon Attie, *Writing on the Wall: Projections in Berlin's Jewish Quarter* (Heidelberg, 1994), pp. 6–8.

⁵⁹ See Rebekka Gopfert, 'Kindertransport History, Memory', trans. by Andrea Hammel, *Shofar*, 23 (2004), 21–27, for a discussion of the commonly held view among Kindertransport and other émigrés of a lack of legitimacy to the claim of Holocaust victim, compared to camp survivors.

⁶⁰ Gibson, 'George Vulkan', *Vienna-London*, 145. For further details on 'A Letter to the Stars', see <http://www.lettertothestars.at/en/page_id_85.html> [accessed 16 September 2018].

⁶¹ For further details of exhibits, see <<http://fdk.milliseagal.at/index.php/die-geschichte/kuenstlerinnen/curators>> [accessed 16 September 2018].

for, and remembering, the 10,000 'Kinder' of the Kindertransport. The exhibits were originally designed and curated by Rosie Potter and Patricia Ayres, at Wimbledon College of Art, London. Each of the twenty-three prints that form the exhibition shows an original suitcase containing objects carried by a child as they travelled into an unknown future. The prints are wall mounted, set in deep wooden box frames enclosed in glass, echoing the traditional museum vitrine.

The permanently installed vitrine-like exhibits are not unlike the modest glass-fronted displays set into the wall along the paths — named 'axes of exile and annihilation' — which lead to the Holocaust Tower of Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin (2001): a few personal or household objects, tiny labels with scraps of information, each one representing a family that fled or was murdered.⁶² They serve a similar purpose to Libeskind's vitrines which, in Elke Heckner's words, 'personalise and reintroduce the question of individual identities'.⁶³ Libeskind's museum is approached by a disruptively angled flight of stairs downwards. The route to Trestler's portraits also led downwards via a rather precarious staircase, firstly to brightly-lit gallery spaces adjoining the 'Kinder' displays.⁶⁴ The spaces in both areas were noticeably colder than at ground-floor level.

None of these effects were intentional, nor was the staging of the *Vienna-London* portraits in this space a deliberate curatorial decision. Nevertheless, on this occasion, the staircase may stand for a symbolic journey, the visitors to the exhibits asked in this way to perform attentiveness to the narratives offered.⁶⁵ Heckner reflects on secondary witnessing through a comparison between Daniel Libeskind's 'architecture of trauma', notably the Jewish Museum in Berlin, and Hirsch's theories, both of which she claims construct different yet related 'spaces of memory'. She describes the effect of Libeskind's structure of voids as a displacement of traditional co-ordinates of spatial orientation: 'The visitor cannot remain in a distant, seemingly safe position of spectatorship.'⁶⁶ In the exhibition spaces of the Museum für das Kind, we followed a path which took us from Trestler's portraits of the elderly 'Kinder', the emphasis on lateness and a celebration of survival displayed in white cube spaces of light, to the darker, brick-lined, cellar-like rooms where the Kindertransport vitrines were displayed in niches. It was 'a bodily experience', the aesthetics 'inseparable from

⁶² See Daniel Libeskind, 'Between the Lines: Extension to the Berlin Museum with the Jewish Museum', *Assemblage*, 12 (1990), 18–57.

⁶³ Elke Heckner, 'Whose Trauma Is It? Identification and Secondary Witnessing in the Age of Postmemory', in *Visualising the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. by David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester, NY, 2008), pp. 62–85 (p. 77).

⁶⁴ Some of the portraits were also installed in a brightly-lit exhibition space on the ground floor where the book launch and reception took place.

⁶⁵ See Vivian M. Patraka, 'Spectacles of Suffering: Performing Presence, Absence and Historical Memory at the U.S Holocaust Museums', in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. by Elin Diamond (New York, 1996), pp. 89–107.

⁶⁶ Heckner, 'Whose Trauma Is It?', p. 63.

the ethical dimension' of the encounter of the present with the past, a disruption of conventional chronology.⁶⁷ The journey made by visitors, moving from contemporary portraiture backwards to the point of exile as children in relative darkness, denied them a sense of being part of a redemptory experience.

On 9 August, a few weeks before the 'Austria in Transit' conference during summer 2017, Libeskind's design proposal for London's Holocaust Memorial (the competition for which was announced by Prime Minister David Cameron on Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January 2016), was the subject of an extended interview on BBC Radio 4.⁶⁸ The design was inspired by a short poem by Paul Celan, titled 'Stehen' [To Stand in the Shadow].⁶⁹ Libeskind proposed a structure of several voids which all led to dead ends — except one, in which a shaft of light would lead to a view across the Thames, representing Britain's Kindertransport rescue efforts. His was the only proposal to recognize this 'beam of light' in an otherwise dark history. Libeskind has described his architecture of the void as a 'place of being and nonbeing [...] yet one can attempt to have access to it through names, addresses, through a kind of haunting quality of spaces through which the passage of absence took place'.⁷⁰

The spaces of the Jewish Museum in Berlin are deliberately discontinuous and disruptive, exemplifying loss. Yet this is a living museum. Its future, as new generations lose touch with the living testimony of survivors, Libeskind argues, is to show that the history of Jewish culture continues to unfold and has a vital future. It may be an act of over-determination to compare this iconic architectural work to Trestler's project. Yet, through reflections on the conditions of displacement and dislocation, the Kindertransport portraits in all their forms act as productive points of engagement for a belated working-through, as well as contemplation, of the continued unfolding of vital futures.

⁶⁷ Heckner proposes that the generation-specific modes of engagement defined by Hirsch and architect Daniel Libeskind have redefined the notion of secondary witnessing as the survivor generation passes away. Ibid.

⁶⁸ John Wilson interview with Daniel Libeskind, 'Front Row', BBC Radio 4, Wednesday 9 August 2017 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/bo8zzlrg>> [accessed 15 October 2018]. The commission was later awarded to a consortium led by David Adjaye, Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects, see <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/oct/24/team-led-david-adjaye-design-uks-holocaust-memorial>> [accessed 22 September 2018]. On the same day as the announcement, Cameron in another context also referred to 'a bunch of migrants'. See Rowena Mason and Frances Perraudin, 'Cameron's "Bunch of Migrants" Jibe is Callous and Dehumanising Say MPs', *Guardian*, 27 January 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/27/david-cameron-bunch-of-migrants-jibe-pmq-callous-dehumanising>> [accessed 30 September 2018].

⁶⁹ Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*, ed. by Beda Allemann, Stefan Reichert and Rolf Bücher, 5 vols (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), II, 23; 'To Stand in the Shadow' ('of the Wound's-Mark in the air'), see <<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/to-stand-in-the-shadow/>> [accessed 30 September 2018].

⁷⁰ Heckner, 'Whose Trauma Is It?', p. 75, citing Daniel Libeskind, 'Trauma', in *Image and Remembrance*, ed. by Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz (Bloomington, IN, 2003), pp. 43–58 (p. 44).

The unspectacular nature of Trestler's portraits, of ordinary and less ordinary people, presents us with lives which can also be recognized as synchronous with our own, sharing as they do the temporal and spatial dimension of wartime, post-war and early twenty-first-century Britain. Trestler's project, Libeskind's Jewish Museum vitrines and those of the Museum für das Kind demonstrate how to translate the experience of rupture and discontinuity into a productive relationship with 'retrospective witnessing'.⁷¹ The individuation of each person through layered forms of portraiture, and a resistance in all ways to catastrophizing a catastrophic past experience, is an exemplar of a twenty-first-century memorial culture 'which has brought into focus issues of pedagogy and ethics' as it takes up specific challenges of 'an individualised approach to public remembering'.⁷² Bringing together this small community of individuals who represent the protagonists and 'last witnesses' of the 10,000 or so who were saved, and by implication, the millions who were not, *Vienna-London Passage to Safety* and its related exhibitions may also provide opportunities to reflect on more recent and urgent issues of forced emigration and the plight of the refugee, at least in the context of the framing of such narratives provided by the 'Austria in Transit' conference.⁷³ Trestler's documentary project, a work of the artist as portraitist, curator and archivist, giving space and voice to the testimonies of living survivors, is an exemplary work of secondary witnessing. It may also be said to contribute to the future-oriented dimension of postmemory, 'a forward-looking interpretation of the past'.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Heckner, 'Whose Trauma Is It?', p. 68.

⁷² Ibid., p. 80.

⁷³ For more detailed information about the 'Austria in Transit' conference held at King's College London from 31 August — to 2 September 2017, please refer to the relevant section in Áine McMurtry's Introduction to this volume.

⁷⁴ Heckner, 'Whose Trauma Is It?', p. 81.