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**These Are Not Old Ruins: A Heritage of the Hrun**

**Gísli Pálsson**[1]

**Abstract** The economic boom and subsequent collapse (Hrun) of the mid 2000s had a marked effect on Reykjavík, leaving various half-finished and empty structures with uncertain futures. Although the material culture of the economic collapse has been examined to some degree, the abandoned building sites have not. The Icelandic heritage discourse has so far had very little engagement with twentieth-century materiality and even less with twenty-first-century materiality but this paper contends that these places can nevertheless be seen as heritage. In order to engage with such places, the Icelandic authorized heritage discourse must be significantly broadened.

**Keywords:** Counter-heritage • Ephemeral heritage • Ruin gazing • Ruins

> As I was driving toward Snæfellsjökull this past Christmas I was treated to an interesting sight (Fig.1). By the side of the road, a fallen over sign read: These are not old ruins. Intrigued, I stopped to locate the non-ruinous feature alluded to by the sign, and sure enough I came across a small concrete shed, built into a sloping hill probably shortly after the Second World War—certainly not old when compared to the time-depth of the landscape, inhabited for over a millennium. The shed itself was hardly impressive either. It looks overwhelmed by its setting, its grass roof perhaps an attempt to blend into the landscape, but its size and shape give the impression that it's being swallowed up by the hills surrounding it. When the shed is viewed from a greater distance, the dwarfing effect surroundings have upon it becomes even more

[1] Department of Archaeology, University of Iceland; e-mail: gisli.palsson@gmail.com

pronounced—flanked on its south side by Faxaflói and on its north by the impressive mountain range stretching throughout the peninsula. To its northwest, the Snæfells glacier looms in the clouds, dominating its surroundings. Like so many of the structures on Snæfellsnes, occupying a thin strand of land flanked by two inhospitable extremes, this little shed reminds one both of the precarious and dangerous conditions to life on this island, as well as of the enduring survivability of its inhabitants—there are certainly signs of habitation dating back centuries. The shed, however, is not old. But as the sign suggests, the shed does draw an interest from passing travelers. Perhaps it signifies the struggle of survival and sustenance that Icelandic farmers have faced for centuries; perhaps its morphology evokes nostalgia for the torfhús that once populated the landscape, but have now disappeared. For whatever reason, it has made people stop their cars to investigate it further, to the annoyance of the landowner. One wonders what effect the rebuttal of old age will have on the attractiveness of the shed to passers-by.

{Fig. 1 near here}

**Introduction**

Does a ruin need to be old in order to be considered relevant, worth examining, or even to be considered a ruin at all? Does the passage of time, as suggested by the sign above, impart an intrinsic value to ruins? A question regarding value suggests the presence, or at least the necessity of an identifiable value system. In the context of archaeological material made available to a wider audience, the value system used is generally referred to as heritage. In this paper I wish to address such questions in the context of the Icelandic heritage discourse. As a case study, I have chosen the building sites abandoned in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, which to this day strongly impact on the visual character of Reykjavík. I will identify

some dimensionalities of heritage that are applicable to considering the value of the abandoned building site as well as discussing commemoration and documentation of the sites. While I may sometimes stray rather far from discussing the sites directly I hope their presence is felt through the inclusion of photographs taken by the author.

{Fig. 2 near here}

**Temporality in Archaeology**

Although the age of material objects has always held the interest of Western societies, it is only with modernity that it became a preoccupation. Thomas (2004, p. 2) posits that the key element in the emergence of archaeology and the preoccupation with the past is modern societies' unusual recognition of their "own material and social conditions as being unlike those of the past." Thus, Man became an historical subject (Foucault, 1970), and the past a "foreign country" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. xvi), or a strategic resource (Fritzsche, 2004, p. 5; Thomas, 1996, p. 54). Thomas (2004, p. 40).contrasts this modality with that of the traditional society, whose myths "embody and are integral to social relations." Such a society, whose myths and legends act as aetiologies and social bonds have no need for an historic past. Nora (Nora, 1996, p. 3) echoes this point when he argues that "[m]emory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present"; consequently, the concept of the past is distinctly a creation of the historical sciences. It is the division of past from present in what Gumbrecht (2002) refers to as the "immanentization" of modernity, and the subsequent need for clarification that serves as the basis for modernity's preoccupation with the past.

This preoccupation manifests itself in a number of ways. To Thomas (Thomas, 2004, p. 7), antiquarianism emerged as a technology of government (cf. Rose & Miller, 1992), providing European nation-states with temporal grounding and providing historical

aetiologies as a means of legitimating certain social groups and practices. Such historically remote foundational events were held to possess an authenticity not replicable without cultural recycling of past experience (Gumbrecht, 2002, p. 122). In broader terms, the authenticity afforded by temporal depth emerged as a candidate to replace transcendence as a basis for a system of knowledge. For example, older words are held to have more authority, to be more authentic and real than younger words. As Benjamin (1999, p. 10) has observed, "the modern … is always citing primal history" to authenticate the present.

The preoccupation with the past goes beyond specific foundational events. According to Nora, modernity valorizes a ubiquitous, undifferentiated "pastness": traditional memory, based on loci memoriae and selective forgetting has become uprooted from its origins and replaced by archival memory, where the significance of a given event is obliterated in a drive to record everything, to sift and sort every trace into the archive of history (Nora, 1996, p. 2) and heritage value given to everything belonging to the past (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 136). Presently, "total recall seems to be the goal" (Huyssen, 2003, p. 15).

This practice of archiving has been interpreted as meeting various needs, such as in freeing modern society from the obligation to remember (Connerton, 2009, p. 29) and addressing the fear of collective amnesia brought about by the commodity form and the age of mechanical reproduction engulfing modern societies (Le Goff, 1992, p. 162). Consequently, "pastness" itself becomes a sufficient basis for embarking upon a historical or archaeological project.

"Pastness" as a notion of value is deeply ingrained in modernity. But what exactly does it mean to call an object or ruin old? If one keeps in mind that temporality is often employed as a technology of government, it is hardly surprising to discover that the amount of time that must pass before an object can acquire an aura of time-depth authenticity is

contingent upon the objectives of heritage evaluators. The contingent nature of time-depth authenticity is most clearly visible in societies that have recently undergone radical political transformations. The birth of new social institutions is followed by the designations of new heritage places to provide legitimating aetiologies. In South Africa, for example, after the African National Congress rose to power in 1994 the National Monuments Council was directed to redress the inherent racism in the heritage list of South Africa which overwhelmingly commemorated the foundation stories of the white minority. What occurred in the process of redressing the imbalance was the emergence of a new nature of heritage sites to accompany the new South Africa (Hart & Winter, 2001, p. 87). The Western schemata for heritage sites as grand, monumental structures, best exemplified by the Venice Charter of 1964 simply did not suit this new society; the overwhelming majority of South African sites meeting the Venice Charter criteria were distinctly colonial, built according to the cultural mores of the white minority. In order to commemorate the origins of the new government, whose members had not enjoyed the same material wealth as their predecessors, the apartheid heritage value system had to be heavily modified. Hart and Winter (2001, p. 87)write that there was "a shift away from the basic assumptions of age and aesthetics as being fundamental criteria for conservation"; sites became more contemporary in nature, and more commensurate with the economic reality of the social groups represented by the ANC. The reduction of temporal boundaries separating the 'new' from the 'old' is not limited to extreme cases such as South Africa. In recent times, the heritage industry has begun to dismiss age as a critical variable, and Fairclough (2008, p. 298) observes that in the twenty-first century, "[t]he chronological spread of heritage has been expanded until there are no significant temporal boundaries at all." This development is perhaps best interpreted as a consequence of the velocity with which modern life is lived (cf. Augé, 1995; Virilio, 1991). As Boym (2010, p. 60) points out, the "pace of modern time precipitates both construction

and destruction, sometimes imploding temporal duration"; new-formed relations become antiquated before they can ossify, as Marx remarked. The rapid change that contemporary culture undergoes renders the recently passed distinctly different from the present, exotic and absurd in equal measure; archaeology has been accelerated toward the present (Stallabrass, 1996, p. 176). Furthermore, Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 3) believes that "the destruction … of the social mechanisms that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations" has meant that contemporary people "grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in," further strengthening the barrier between the past and the present. Kluge (1985) has spoken of an attack of the present on the rest of time; a colonization where the present imposes new meanings on past events, and the "genuinely old" (Huyssen, 2010, p. 19) becomes hard to recognize. González-Ruibal (2008, p. 262) has furthermore rightly points out that since all archaeology takes place in the present and engages with the materiality of the present, "there is no archaeology of the twenty-first century but only an archaeology of the twenty-first and all its pasts, mixed and entangled."

Other authors have taken to view temporality as one aspect of a broader theme with which the project of archaeology is engaged. Rather than being strictly concerned with the study of "old" things, the aim of archaeology is the "presencing of absence" (Buchli & Lucas, 2001c, p. 171). As Rathje (quoted in Buchli & Lucas, 2001a, p. p. 3; see also Harrison & Schofield, 2010, p. 38) has argued, "archaeology can no longer be defined either by digging or a concern for old data, but is 'a focus on the interaction between material culture and human behaviour, regardless of time and space.'" If the aim is the uncovering of the hidden, the recovery of the forgotten, then the study of a recently abandoned council house is just as relevant to the project of archaeology as the study of a first-century BCE Roman temple (cf. Buchli & Lucas, 2001b). In a society where time passes immediately into history, where the

recently passed is already exotic and absurd, it seems entirely apposite to turn the archaeological gaze onto the materiality of the moment.

In Iceland, temporality is employed to assign archaeological value and legislative protection to sites (arbitrarily set at 100 years, although only pre-1850 houses are protected), which was intended not strictly to separate objects and structures based on age but to separate the "modern" from the "traditional" (Pétursdóttir, 2009, p. 3). The current legislation supports this approach, as the criterion of 100 years is a sufficient but not necessary condition for protection, but in reality the figure of 100 years dominates Icelandic archaeological practice to the detriment of younger materiality. When exceptions have been made to protect structures younger than 100 years old, it has generally concerned structures that fall within the paradigm of the traditional (i.e., turf houses), maintaining the traditional/contemporary separation. A structure that does not fall within the paradigm of the traditional is unlikely to be considered for protection unless considered to be of exceptional significance, usually due to the fame of the architect that designed it. Meanwhile, few "contemporary" urban structures ever reach an age at which protection becomes apposite within the paradigm of the Icelandic authorized heritage discourse due to the rapid redevelopment of Iceland's cities, particularly Reykjavík. Consequently, the material remains of singular periods in the history of twentieth-century Iceland—fortifications from the Second World War, structures built during the 60 year-long US military presence, factories relict from the various economic ventures now largely abandoned—disappear rapidly, often with no intervention or documentation by the national heritage industry.

Despite tentative steps forward, the Icelandic authorized heritage discourse still seems overly based on the principles of the Venice Charter, with its emphasis on monumentality, representative excellence and a reverence of the design (Smith, 2006, pp. 89-95). Consequently there is a lack of considering heritage in practice. In de Certeau's (1984, p. xix)

terms, the discursive focus is on the strategic ways in which those in power formulate the normative uses of heritage whereas there is a lack of focus on the tactical poiesis that results from people's engagement with heritage places. As Smith (Smith, 2006, p. 44) suggests, heritage can be seen as "a cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and … sites themselves are cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process." Meanings are negotiated in specific ways, where the site is a "theatre of memory" (cf. Samuel, 1994) where heritage practices take place, rather than being a carrier of intrinsic value.

In order to be able to reflect on sites and places as theatres of memory and identity and not simply as carriers of historicity and authentic time-depth value it is necessary to move beyond the authorized heritage discourse. In doing so, the fossilized requirement of old age or traditional morphology melts into air. If ruins no longer need to be old to merit consideration, then a variety of places rarely given much attention suddenly appear in the heritage industry's field of vision. Much like the way in which the reformulation of archaeology as a presencing of the absent erases the requirement of antiquity, the reformulation of heritage as cultural process places the burden on the heritage industry to properly consider the twentieth-century structures so vulnerable to redevelopment. It is on this basis that I wish to explore some ways in which the building projects abandoned in the wake of the 2008 economic collapse may be thought of as theatres where people conduct relationships with their pasts, both the very recent and farther removed.

**Value in the Recent Past**

Twentieth-century remains have been included in the heritage discourse in several countries. English Heritage recently launched a major new initiative to characterize, promote and manage post-war material remains (Penrose, 2007). In the United States, the post-Fordist industrial landscapes have garnered attention (Steinmetz, 2010). In Germany, the

heritagization of contemporary structures effectively began in the inter-bellum period with Hitler and Speer's theory of ruin-value, according to which it was not sufficient for state structures to look well but also to die well, and in ruins serve as symbols of pride and hope to future Germans living in less fortunate times (Hell, 2010, p. 185). The devastations wrought by the Second World War led to further developments in contemporary ruin gazing as people struggled to come to terms with the new ruinscapes dominating Germany. The ruins were an enduring presence in the cultural works of mid-twentieth-century Germany, spawning genres distinguished today by their strong associations with ruins (Von Moltke, 2010). The genre of Trümmerfilm (rubble film) depicted the ruins as a symbol of the German people, taking "stock of a shattered nation and registering a state of physical and psychological ruin" (Rentschler, 2010, p. 419). The films focused on the lives of ordinary Germans and the everyday life of the post-war period, and it is fitting that the ruins are not used in a monumental sense, serving instead as backdrops to the lives of Germans, an undifferentiated materialization of hardship. In Lefebvre's (1991, p. 118) terms, there is a move away from the overreliance of the marvelous to beautify the quotidian toward an appreciation of the ordinary, a heritage of everyday life.

Some of the ruins depicted in Trümmerfilme still exist in the reconstructed German cities as Menetekels deliberately left behind as conduits for coming to terms with the past (Eshel, 2010, p. 134). Similar places exist in other countries ravaged by Nazi atrocities and allied bombing, notably concentration camps in Poland and Oradour-sur-Glane in France (Olivier, 2001). What is notable about such places is that structurally and architecturally speaking, they are quite ordinary. They do not conform with the traditional notion of heritage value as being intrinsic to the masterpieces of human endeavor, and they are generally not constructed for the purpose of commemoration; in Riegl's (1982) formulation, they are unintentional monuments whose mnemonic value is not an overt goal of their makers but a

product of later events. Dolff-Bonekämper (2008, p. 137) uses the term Streitwert to describe the heritage value of such places; they are also referred to as places of pain and shame in the heritage literature (Logan & Reeves, 2009, p. 1). One of the most prominent examples of heritagizing the unspectacular in Germany is Duisburg Nord Landscape Park, an abandoned steel mill converted wholesale into a recreation park. Left open to visitors at all hours, the park was explicitly constructed to serve a compensatory role in adjusting the population of the Ruhr valley to deindustrialization and economic contraction; the planners point out with pride that Duisburg Nord has allowed people to "feel better, even though objectively the economic situation remains unchanged" (Barndt, 2010, p. 277).

**Remembering the Hrun**

The effects of the financial excesses and the financial meltdown (Hrun) of the 2000s in Iceland and elsewhere are well documented (Jóhannesson, 2009; Stiglitz, 2010). In Iceland, investors, fuelled by readily available foreign credit undertook ambitious and risky ventures leading to a very visible accumulation of property and debt. Although there has been a lively discourse within the cultural community about the way in which the Hrun should be remembered, documented and exhibited, the discussion on material culture has been limited to what objects to collect and display, usually within the museum space (Kjartansdóttir, 2010). The significant changes to the cityscape of Reykjavík brought about by the economic boom and bust have been ignored in comparison. The effects on the Icelandic construction industry were highly visible. A building boom effected rapid change in Reykjavík's cityscape, where office buildings and high-end apartment buildings dominated the program of urban regeneration. One is reminded of James Joyce's (2000, p. 69) quote, that "a good puzzle would be [to] cross Dublin without passing a pub"; a traveler would have been similarly troubled in trying to traverse Reykjavík during the mid-2000s without passing a building site.

The building sites are still there, many have changed little in 2 years, except in one important way—the cranes are gone. A skyline of cranes is perhaps the most salient indicator of a growing city, whereas a building site without cranes signifies something entirely different. A lack of cranes signifies stasis, abandonment; it indicates that the contractor has essentially given up on the site, at least in the short term, and that continuing the construction now requires a significant initial financial output. It is safe to assume that this will not become a feasible option for some time—the country is still in recession ("EU Politics Today," 2010). Reykjavik's citizens can therefore expect to live with these cemented reminders of recent troubles for the foreseeable future, and some are quite hard to avoid—Skuggahverfi and Höfðatorg are among the tallest structures ever built in Iceland. The irony is that these buildings were constructed for only a tiny minority of the Icelandic population. Vastly expensive, these were to be the new homes of the "Icelandic business Viking," the ironically prophetic term applied to the investors who, it was believed, were building a strong financial sector to enrich the nation, but turned out to be glorified pillagers. Although the facades are often at an advanced stage of completion, the insides are invariably un-worked, raw and empty. So they stand—empty houses for empty promises, alienated from the population from the start—first by prohibitive cost, now by abandonment and disuse. Abandoned by a crippled construction industry, the vanished high end housing market, and creditors seeing no hope for a return on investment, the structures stand, hollow and decaying, constantly reminding one of short term thinking and excess consumption. Although the structures discussed in this paper have been abandoned quite recently, and in many cases appear pristine, I nevertheless think they belong to the category of ruins. Hell and Schönle (Hell & Schönle, 2010, p. 6) point out that "a ruin is a ruin precisely because it seems to have lost its function or meaning in the present." Many authors have pointed to the peculiar nature of ruins. Hell and Schönle (2010, p. 6) argue that "the ruin signals the impending breakdown

of meaning and therefore fosters intensive compensatory discursive activity." Others point out that ruins are difficult to bring into the dominant system of representation (Edensor, 2005, p. 95), and therefore possess a protean nature where human and non-human agents interact with chaotic effects, and where new forms of growth arise out of decay (Roth, 1997, p. 2). Consequently the meanings produced and ascribed to the spaces of ruination are unpredictable (Edensor, 2005, p. 108). Huyssen (Huyssen, 2010, p. 19) argues that architecture in a state of decay is an indispensable topos for modernist thought, as ruins "function as screens on which modernity projects its asynchronous temporalities and its fear of and obsession with the passing of time." Boym (2010, p. 58) argues that the discursive ambiguity of ruins fosters thoughts of "the past that could have been and the future that never took place, tantalizing us with utopian dreams of escaping the irreversibility of time."

{Fig. 3 near here}

Vidler (Vidler, 2010, p. 30) identifies a more specific function of ruins in modernist thought: the sight of the ruined and decayed instills in us the desire to "build back higher and stronger than before." Although Vidler is primarily concerned with the ruins produced by terrorism and warfare, I believe the point holds true more broadly. Structures ruined by natural forces or socio-economic factors, often externalized into recognizable adversarial agents such as an aggressive world market or government failure (cf. Berman, 2010, p. 106), elicit much the same response: an attack on societal values leading to the reinforcing of identity, tightening of community relations and structural rebuilding. At a time "when the promises of the modern age lie shattered like so many ruins" (Huyssen, 2010, p. 17), it is perhaps only in ruined spaces that the project of continuous improvement, so vital to Enlightenment thought, seems most readily achievable. As Eshel (Eshel, 2010, p. 135) argues, ruins are not solely the "material manifestation of a fascination with destruction and demise … [but] also enable us to think about the historicity of our condition and even

experience hope."

Ruins are also powerful places of memory. Berman (Berman, 2010, p. 105) writes that "the relic testifies that a genuine life … has come to an end and that what remains points backward to the missing … the ruin is therefore both legacy and mnemonic … [g]azing on the ruin, we revive the past as memory." It needs to be pointed out, however, that the commemoration of past events and the emplacement of memories is an active process, and as Nora (Nora, 1996, p. 7). argues, that "without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep [sites of memory] away" into the undifferentiated archive of historical traces It is too soon perhaps to hypothesize whether the Hrun will be remembered, where such memories will become emplaced, or whether these ruined buildings will ever become "bastions of identity," much less whose identity they will take part in constructing. There is still ample room for conjecture. One mnemonic dimension to the ruin is the way in which it calls attention to the conditions leading to its demise, often bringing to mind processes that tend to be forgotten. As pointed out by Heidegger (Heidegger, 1996, p. 104), one only becomes conscious of the workings of a machine when it breaks down, when it reverts from being ready-to-hand to being present-to-hand. Similarly, the appearance of the "cracks on modern transparencies" (Boym, 2010, p. 58) may call to mind the systematically forgotten, and hence under-examined mechanisms of the commodity form and the structural foundations of a consumerist, capitalist society (Connerton, 2009, p. 43). It is unclear whether there is a particular desire to critically examine the nature of the consumerist society. The abandoned projects of Icelandic society were, for example, not chosen as sites of protest during the turbulent months following the economic collapse. The places that were chosen were either traditional topoi of national identity, such as Austurvöllur, or places signifying the people and institutions that were seen as having failed in controlling the economic situation, and by extension as having caused the crisis. Thus, protests took place at banks, at regulatory bodies,

and at the homes of venture capitalists and the politicians associated with the culture of financial imprudence and excess. The abandoned building projects, which I would suggest symbolized broader, more endemic causes of the collapse—unsustainable consumption patterns, large household borrowings—were to a large degree left alone. Edensor (Edensor, 2005, p. 8) has observed that such behavior is common toward ruined sites: rather than seeing abandoned and derelict factories and lands as a critique of capitalism, they are instead left alone and temporarily forgotten until a time when an economic upturn leads to redevelopment, a tacit acceptance of the boom and bust nature of the capitalist system. One could thus argue that in choosing not to select the abandoned buildings as sites of gathering, the target of the protesters was not the current economic system and associated consumptive practice, but rather the people who were perceived as having failed to ensure that the system worked. In other words, the protest was conducted firmly within a capitalist mode of vision.

**The Mirror of Heritage**

In the context of the Icelandic heritage narrative, what it means to be an Icelander has only recently begun to be examined. Throughout the twentieth century, the nature of Icelandic heritage was intimately connected with the notions of continuity of Icelandic culture from the Landnám, and a unity of purpose and vision common to every Icelander—*une et indivisible* (Hálfdanarson, 2002). This ideology, championed by men such as Sigurður Nordal and Jón Jónsson Aðils was largely based on Saga studies and the relatively minor differences between Old Norse and modern Icelandic. Hálfdanarson (2002, p. 313) argues that it had a strong influence on the social memory of Icelanders, especially through the textbook writing of Jón Jónsson, and masked the historigraphical research suggesting that Icelandic society was multicultural (Gunnell, 2006; Þorláksson, 2007) and socially stratified (Kristinsson, 2002) from an early age. That aside, the existence of ethnic minorities in Iceland are a fairly recent phenomenon. Over the past two decades a large number of immigrants entered the country,

primarily to meet a growing demand for manual laborers. Of primary interest for this paper is the Polish community specifically brought to the country to reconstruct Reykjavík, and who played a leading role in constructing almost every one of the buildings now abandoned. Although many chose to leave once the construction industry collapsed and jobs disappeared, a significant number chose to stay and to become part of the urban community

{Fig. 4 near here}

If the community of Reykjavík has become multicultural, should the heritage industry not follow suit? Presently the discourse of multiculturalism in Iceland is primarily a spectacle, where foreign cultures are put "on display" and reified into representative, stereotypical objects such as the didgeridoo for Australia and the pickled gherkin for Poland (Rastrick, 2007, p. 339). It is thus superficially packaged for the "true" Icelander to consume, rather than exploring the nature of multicultural Reykjavík (see also Hafstein, 2006), showing a clear specular bias adhering to the tradition of Icelanders as *une et indivisible*.

In an influential work, Hayden (1995) points to the significant bias of heritage sites commemorating the heritage of Los Angeles' dominant social group—in 1986, 97.7% of the city's designated cultural landmarks were Anglo-American, while only 2.3% commemorated the cultures of minority groups comprising 60% of the population (Hayden, 1995; Schofield, 2008). A similar bias against eastern Europeans by the "WASP charter group" has been observed in Winnipeg (Tunbridge, 2008, p. 237). Byrne furthermore discusses the deep and often unquestioned biases that Aboriginal Australian heritage is subjected to, leading to a failure of understanding and appreciation of the social significance of place in the Aboriginal community (Byrne, 2008). Which places in Reykjavík's cityscape will mediate the developing narrative of the Polish experience? As Hall (Hall, 2008, p. 223) puts it, "Heritage is a powerful mirror. Those who do not see themselves in it are therefore excluded." What

will third-generation Polish-Icelanders feel when they see a statue of Ingólfur Arnarsson, or a torfhús? They might quite possibly feel nothing at all. It is important, as per the declaration of the Faro Convention of 2005, not to simply ask how we protect heritage, but to ask why we should enhance value, and for whom (Fairclough, 2008, p. 299). The traditional narrative of the heritage industry is to mitigate differences and establish visions of community, usually to the exclusion of minority views (Urry, 1996). However, the act of capturing the plurality of modern society within a singular understanding of heritage is a contravention of inclusion and a denial of the legitimacy of dissonant views and differences (Smith & Waterton, 2009, p. 30). In order to make room for minority groups in Reykjavík's history it is necessary to examine the different heritages and values coexisting.

**Beyond Preservation**

If such abject places as abandoned, half-built buildings can be placed within the discursive space of heritage, what implications does that have in terms of treatment? Does heritage value necessitate a form of preservation or conservation? Due to the vibrant nature of ruins alluded to above, and the unpredictable ways in which memories become emplaced into *lieux de mémoire*, especially in places of ruin, preservation seems out of place. Indeed, ruins appear particularly unsuitable to the processes traditionally associated with cultural resource management. Woodward (2001) describes the diverse constellations of meanings surrounding the Coliseum in Rome while it was still in a ruined state—a wild and chaotic place breeding a wealth of sensory experience—and contrasts that with the controlled and limited semiotics of the Coliseum after it was cleaned up and ordered through the appropriation and monumentalization carried out by the nascent Italian state in the late nineteenth century. The practice of preservation and restoration are quite destructive to sites which Chateaubriand described as "imprinted [with] the black of centuries" (Nelson & Olin, 2010, p. 1), but modern ruins seem even less conducive to the methodologies of heritage management.

Edensor (Edensor, 2005, p. 95) points out that ruins do not occupy a place in the dominant system of representation, and so the induction of ruined places into heritage systems necessarily involves a transformative process that alters the ruined site in more radical ways than a site with a recognizable function.

But if preservation is not the objective, is there any benefit in a heritage approach to Reykjavík's abandoned building sites? The notion that heritage designations are necessarily followed by some form of protection and preservation pervades the discourse in the heritage industry. The ideology is problematic; as Byrne points out, Westerners view change and progress as staple elements to Western culture (Byrne, 2008, p. 163). Why should the materiality of meaningful places be frozen in time? Furthermore, in a society where progress has an almost sacred significance, why should heritage places remain unchanged? Although some places certainly merit strict protection and preservation, that designation is certainly not appropriate to every place of historic and cultural significance. As Kerr (Kerr, 2008, p. 323) aptly puts it, heritage is what we inherit, and that "includes things we do, and do not, want to keep as well as things we want to modify or develop further." Change is an essential aspect of our environment, and the heritage industry should be able to engage with changing places without imposing the cumbersome and costly apparati of preservation.

{Fig. 5 near here}

As Butler (Butler, 2006, p. 462) points out, the heritage gaze can be seen as "modernity's privileged medium for reflecting upon the human condition"; admittedly a vaguely defined role, but one that reflects the growing recognition of the need to move beyond preservation. The valuation of heritage changes constantly with changing perceptions and attitudes (Dolff-Bonekämper, 2008), and the contemporary landscape changes constantly through repair, reconstruction, demolition and decay. Instead of combating change, it is

important to contemplate and document the process of change (Penrose, 2007). Decay and degradation have begun to be recognized as meaningful aspects of places under the supervision of heritage authorities, such as Brodsworth Hall, acquired by English Heritage in 1999, where "patinas of use and ecologically shrouded decay [are regarded as] valuable elements in a holistic view of the historic environment" (Baker, 2005, p. 2). Also worth mentioning is DeSilvey's (2006, 2007a, 2007b) curatorial approach to an abandoned Montana homestead, in which the issue of documenting and engaging with the ambiguous elements generally cleaned up and removed in the practice of conservation plays a central part.

Interdisciplinary approaches are useful in moving beyond preservation. The visual arts have long been fascinated by ruins. With roots in classic works such as Piranesi's paintings of classical ruins (Drooker, Brinkley, & Woodward, 2007) and the Lumiére brothers' 1895 descriptively-titled film *The Demolition of a Wall* (Skrdla, 2006), the visualization of ruins has developed into a rich genre. Photography has an especially strong affinity with modern ruins, particularly in the works of the Bechers (Lange, 2006), but also evidenced by numerous more recent works on the dereliction and ruin at the heart of Western cities (e.g. Drooker, et al., 2007; Glancey, 2008; Margaine, 2009; Skrdla, 2006; Stamp, 2007; Talling, 2008; Vergara, 1999). Others have experimented with scale models to represent ruins (Puff, 2010).

The theme of diachronicity and change has been explored in the visual depiction of graffiti. The "grafarc explorer" is a database containing images taken of popular graffiti spots in Los Angeles, and images are ordered chronologically, allowing the user to "excavate" the wall by diachronic comparison of images (www.grafarc.org; see also Harrison & Schofield, 2010, p. 113). Such an approach seems quite apt in depicting the half-built and abandoned, given the ephemeral nature of the state the buildings are in, and the uncertainty surrounding

their future growth both in the short term (temporary measures to restrict access and arrest decay) and long term (future redevelopment or destruction).

Another avenue of engaging with abandoned places is the practice of urban exploration. Urban explorers enter "abandoned, condemned and ruined architecture [and document their engagement] through photography and written accounts" (Sorensen, 2007, p. 89). The practice of urban exploration bears a strong resemblance to phenomenological archaeology by focusing on an embodied perspective of one's site of interest and in the documentation of the embodied experience of place rather than simply documenting material configurations. A plan view is rejected in favor of embodied vision documenting the experience of negotiating through a site, giving it contextual meaning that may complement well more traditional methods of representation. (A large archive of urban explorations can be found at www.infiltration.org.)

{Fig. 6 near here}

**Conclusion**

The buildings discussed in this paper are abandoned and incomplete due to the current state of the economy. That may change, however, and a rising housing market may precipitate further development on the buildings. While one site may slowly degrade until any potentiality of re-construction disappears, until eventually torn down, another may have a brighter future, seeing reconstruction, inhabitation and renovation. The sites may even be demolished in the near future in order to facilitate forgetting when the last glimmer of hope that they can ever be finished has disappeared, like malanggans are discarded once the spirit of the deceased has finally escaped its material embodiment. We should recognize that their current state is temporary and ephemeral, a phase in their life cycle, but that does not diminish the value of their current state as indices of a time charged with historicity whose

stories may provide texture to the commemoration of the events comprising the Banking Crisis of 2008.

If the goal of archaeology is presencing the absent rather than studying the old—defined so by an arbitrary chronological cut-off—then a number of places heretofore ignored enter archaeology's field of vision. The Icelandic heritage industry needs a new way of seeing in order for twentieth- and twenty-first-century "anonymous sculptures" to enter the authorized heritage discourse. Such a way of seeing must be formulated by studying the way in which people negotiate places as conduits for coming to terms with the past, based on the study of memory, the practice of everyday life, the abject, hidden and underrepresented, as well as employing methods of representation used by the visual arts. With a new way of seeing, even the very recent material remains can be appreciated for their contribution to a heritage of the human condition and places can be conduits for coming to terms with the past.

{Fig. 7 near here}

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**Figure Captions**

Fig. 1. A fallen sign by Route 574, Snæfellsnes.

Fig. 2. An empty high rise in Skuggi, a luxury apartment compound.

Fig. 3. Discarded helmet and cups, Skuggi

Fig. 4. POLAND – inside a luxury penthouse, Skuggi.

Fig. 5a and 5b. Dalshraun. The front of the building looks finished, apart from makeshift wooden railing on the roof. A banner on its facade reads FOR RENT. The back of the building looks decidedly unfinished, however.

Fig. 6. Inside a luxury apartment building, Mánatún.

Fig. 7. Norðurbakki. A traditional house clad in corrugated iron has survived the recent urban renewal. Many like it did not survive.