



Spectral Memories of Icelandic Culture

Memory, Identity and the Haunted Imagination in Contemporary
Literature and Art

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HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Abstract

The thesis examines what I term *spectral memories* in Icelandic culture and focuses on the interplay between memory, identity and the haunted imagination in contemporary literary texts and visual works of art. I employ the term “spectral” to define memories that have for various reasons been forgotten, silenced and repressed in the cultural psyche, but have returned to the public realm by means of contemporary art and literature. Spectrality theory, and the seminal work of Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, serve as a point of departure for the project, my initial aim being to relate the spectre to ideas of memory and theories on cultural memory studies. I argue that the spectral return offers the potential of a transformative dynamic exchange between memory and recipient, and an opportunity to critically reflect on the past in order to work towards a better future. The spectre becomes a metaphor for the blind spots of memory: on the one hand for memories that return from the past to disturb mainstream notions and homogenous ideas on identity, and on the other for how certain periods have produced *spectral* cultural responses. The first part of the thesis explores how the archive becomes a storage space for spectral memories, whereas the second part examines spectral cultural memories following the financial crash and crisis in Iceland in 2008. In both parts, I look at narratives and images that prove to be *haunted* by repressed memories, which impacts how the present-day identity is conceived, illustrating the intricate connections between memory, identity and the haunted imagination.

Ágrip

Í ritgerðinni rannsaka ég vofulegar minningar í íslenskri menningu og skoða flókið samspil minnis, sjálfsmyndar og reimleika í samtímabókmenntatextum og myndlistarverkum. Ég beiti hugtakinu „vofulegar“ til að skilgreina minningar sem af ólíkum ástæðum hafa gleymst, verið þaggðar eða niðurbældar í sameiginlegri menningarvitund þjóðarinnar, en hafa opinberast aftur fyrir tilstilli samtímabókmennta og myndlistar. Vofufræði (e. spectrality theory), og verk franska heimspekingsins Jacques Derrida, *Vofur Marx*, eru upphafspunktur rannsóknarinnar, með það að leiðarljósi að tengja vofuna við hugmyndir um minni og kenningar í menningarlegum minnisfræðum (e. cultural memory studies). Ég færi rök fyrir því að endurkoma vofunnar hvetji til gagnrýnna minnisviðtaka, þar sem viðtakandi, sem staðsettur er í samtímanum, tekur við minningum fortíðar, greinir þær og skilur með gagnrýnum hætti, og með það að leiðarljósi að leggja grunninn að sanngjarnari eða réttmætari framtíð. Vofan verður að myndlíkingu fyrir blinda bletti minnis og minningar sem ekki eru sýnilegir á opinberum vettvangi en eru samt sem áður til staðar. Rannsóknin tekur annars vegar fyrir gleymdar minningar fortíðar, sem dregnar eru fram í dagsljósið og trufla ríkjandi, einsleitir og staðnaðar hugmyndir um sameiginlega sjálfsmynd í samtímanum, og hins vegar sögulegt tímabil og atburði sem getið hafa af sér vofulegar minningar. Í fyrri hluta ritgerðarinnar rannsaka ég hvernig arkífið eða skjalasafnið (e. archive) verður að geymslustað vofulegra minninga, en fjöldamargar opinberar stofnanir geyma minningar sem ekki eru alla jafna til sýnis á opinberum vettvangi og fjalla til að mynda um nýlendusögu Íslendinga, óeirðir og mótmæli. Þegar þær eru dregnar fram í dagsljósið, gefa þessar minningar annars konar mynd af sameiginlegri sjálfsmynd þjóðarinnar en þá sem iðulega birtist opinberlega. Þegar litið er til einkalífs og til fjölskylduminnis, og minninga sem ólíkar kynslóðir deila, má sjá hvernig ákveðnir staðir heimilisins, eins og kjallari eða háaloft, verða að geymslustað vofulegra minninga, og geyma hluti og skjöl sem ekki eru til sýnis eða umræðu í daglegu lífi fjölskyldunnar. Í seinni hluta ritgerðarinnar beini ég sjónum að efnahagshruninu árið 2008 og hvernig það leiddi af sér vofulegar minningar; bókmenntatexta og myndlistarverk sem fjalla um reimleika með einum eða öðrum hætti. Draugahúsið í glæpasögu Yrsu Sigurðardóttur, *Ég man þig*; melankólía og sorg fjölskyldunnar í *Hvítfeld* eftir Kristínu Eiríksdóttur; teikningar Guðjóns Ketilssonar af hálfbyggðum húsum í efnahagskreppunni, og ljósmyndir Ingvars Högna Ragnarssonar af vofulegum stöðum í borgarlandslaginu á tímum fjármálahruns, gefa færi á að rannsaka þennan sögulega tíma út frá hugmyndum um draugagang og bælingu. En hver er ásóttur og af hverjum?

Í báðum hlutum ritgerðarinnar greini ég frásagnir og myndir sem reynast ásóttar af niðurbældum minningum sem hafa áhrif á hvernig sjálfsmynd er mótuð í samtímanum, og sýnir fram á þau þéttu en flóknu tengsl sem liggja á milli minnis, sjálfsmyndar og reimleika.

Table of contents

Table of figures	8-9
Preface	10
Introduction	11-30
Spectral Memory: What and why?	11-16
What is cultural memory?	16-21
Spectral memory as a dynamic and transformative encounter between past and present	21-27
Outline of chapters	27-30
Part I: Spectral Memories from the Archive	31-120
Chapter 1: Spectral Memories from the Institutional Archive	33-87
The archive as storage for spectral memories	34-40
Modernisation of the archive: colonialism and photography.....	40-42
<i>Musée Islandique</i> and <i>Das Experiment Island</i> by Ólöf Nordal	42-43
<i>Musée Islandique</i>	43-148
The colonial archive and historical context	49-55
<i>Das Experiment Island</i>	56-61
The uncanny associations of the archive	61-65
What kind of memories?	65-66
<i>Traces</i> by Unnar Örn Auðarson	66-72
<i>Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: Part II</i>	72-73
The photograph as an archival record	74-75
Photograph as spectre	75-77
<i>Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: The photograph and national imagery</i>	77-81
<i>Fragments: murmur of a nation</i>	81-85
Conclusion to chapter one: spectral memories of the institutional archive	85-87
Chapter 2: Spectral Memories from the Family Archive	88-120
The family archive in <i>Fórnarleikar</i> : the spectral state of postmemories	89-91
Postmemory and the family trauma	91-95
Postmemory and the family archive	95-99
Family pictures: archived photographs	99-102
<i>Fórnarleikar</i> : the impossibility of writing a life story	102-104
Spectral memories of the childhood archive in <i>Elín, ýmislegt</i>	104-105
“Enigmatic time-capsules” and archive fiction	105-109
Archived material: spectral memories	109-114
<i>Elín, ýmislegt</i> : a novel on forgetting?	114-118
Conclusion: spectral memories from the family archive	118-119

Spectral Memories from the Archive: concluding remarks to part I	119-120
Part II: Spectral Memories of the Financial Crash and Crisis	121-215
Chapter 3: Literary Ghosts and Spectral Memories of the Financial Crisis	123-185
The Crash: a collective shock	124-129
The Crash: crisis of memory and identity	130-134
Aesthetic response to the Crash: the spectral-uncanny	135-142
<i>I Remember You</i> : a Crash-horror in the time of economic crisis	142-143
<i>I Remember You</i> : two stories of hauntings in the wake of the Crash	144-148
<i>I Remember You</i> : the haunted house	147-149
Reactions and agency: why does the ghost return?	149-154
Hauntings in Ísafjörður: three different types of spectral presence	154-157
Hauntings in Ísafjörður: spectral mourning as haunting	157-162
Significance of the haunting for the narrative and broader context	162-163
<i>Hvítfeld</i> : uncanny family novel	163-164
<i>Hvítfeld</i> and the Crash: the falseness and collapse of the ideal	164-170
<i>Hvítfeld</i> : unhomely family life and melancholic characters	170-176
<i>Hvítfeld</i> : melancholic mourning	176-179
<i>Hvítfeld</i> and the spectral space: the unhomely home	179-184
Literary ghosts and spectral memories of the financial crisis: concluding remarks	184-185
Chapter 4: The Visual Unhomely and The Spectral Spaces of the Economic Crisis	186-215
<i>Roles</i> : photorealist drawings of the unhomely space	188-196
<i>Roles</i> : The house and the human subject	196-198
<i>Waiting</i> : Crash-photographs of emptiness and melancholia in the urban space	199-200
<i>Waiting</i> : contemporary urban space and memory	200-202
<i>Waiting</i> : capitalist ruins	202-212
Concluding remarks: spectral mourning in the urban space	212-213
Spectral memories and the financial crisis: concluding remarks to Part II	214-215
Conclusion	216-222
Samantekt	223-231
Bibliography	232-242

Table of figures

Image 1.1 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Buste en plâtre de Skafti Skartasen, né à Reykjavik le 2 juillet 1805, mécanicien. Islandais. (Plaster bust of Skafti Skaftason, born in Reykjavik, July 2 1805, mechanic. Icelandic). Photo 90 × 90 cm. 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.2 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Buste en plâtre de Bjarni Johnson, Islandais, moulé sur le vivant par M. Stahl, peint par M. Froment. (Plaster bust of Bjarni Jónsson, an Icelander, cast by Mr. Stahl from a life model, painted by Mr. Froment.). Photo 90 × 90 cm. 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.3 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. La main gauche de Sigridur Bjarnadotter et Thorci Arnardotter, serviteurs islandais. (The left hand of Sigríður Bjarnadóttir and Þórunn Árnadóttir, Icelandic maidservants). Photo 77 × 60 cm. 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.4 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Partie antérieure du torse, moulage du membre supérieur gauche, moulage du membre inférieur gauche de Kristian Gislason, 23 ans, né à Reykjavik, pêcheur islandais (Front of torso, cast of left arm, cast of left leg of Kristján Gíslason, aged 23, born in Reykjavík. Icelandic fisherman.) Photo 115 x 90 cm. 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.5 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Partie antérieure du torse, moulage du membre supérieur gauche, moulage du membre inférieur gauche de Fridrika Gudmundsdottir, née à Reykjavik le 28 janvier 1819. Islandaise. (Front of torso, cast of left arm, cast of left leg of Friðrika Guðmundsdóttir, born in Reykjavik, January 28th 1819. Icelandic). Photo 70 × 90 cm. 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.6 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island II*. Photo 90 × 135 cm. 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.7 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island IV*. Photo 90 × 135 cm. 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.8 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island V*. Photo 90 × 135 cm. 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.9 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island VIII*. Photo 35 × 50 cm. 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.10 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island X*. Photo 35 × 50 cm. 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.11 Alain Resnais, *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955), still (shoes). Courtesy Argos Films, Paris.

Image 1.12 Alain Resnais, *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955), still (shaven hair) Courtesy Argos Films, Paris.

Image 1.13 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 23 September 1981. An image showing Government House on Lækjargata spattered with gobs of tar. Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm. Archival Pigment Print. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.14 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 30 March 1949. An image of Austurvöllur square depicting the aftermath of the Althingi approving Iceland joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.15 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 31 March 1949. An image of the Parliament chamber depicting the aftermath of Iceland's entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.16 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 9 November 1932. An image of the meeting room in the Good Templars (I.O.G.T) Hall on the corner of Vonarstræti and Templarasund, after a city council meeting. Photograph: Reykjavik Museum of Photography, Magnús Ólafsson [1862- 1937], 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.17 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 17 February 1953. An image of the hot-water tanks of the Reykjavik public energy utility at Öskjuhlíð hill. Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm. Archival Pigment Print. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.18 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 16 November 1969. An image of the television studio at the NATO base on Miðnesheiði, near Keflavik. Photograph: Archive of the newspaper Tíminn; attributed to Guðjón Einarsson [1924- 2004] 56 x 70 cm. Archival Pigment Print. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.19 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Fragments from The Deeds of Unrest: Part II*, exhibition view. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.20 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Niðurrinn (e. Murmur)*. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.21 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Fragments from The Deeds of Unrest: Part II*, exhibition view. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 1.22 Unnar Örn Auðarson, Still from: *Mise en Scène* [21 April 1971] 8.35 min. loop. From the documentary archives of the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RÚV). Courtesy of the artist.

Image 3.1 Comic by Elín Elísabet for *The Reykjavík Grapevine*, published September 23, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.1 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm. Courtesy of National Gallery of Iceland.

Image 4.2 Guðjón Ketilsson, *Roles*, exhibition view, 2009, ASÍ Art museum. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.3 Guðjón Ketilsson, *Sundays in Norðurmýri*, 2011, pencil on paper, 42x42 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.4 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm. Courtesy of National Gallery of Iceland.

Image 4.5 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm. Courtesy of National Gallery of Iceland.

Image 4.6 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm. Courtesy of National Gallery of Iceland.

Image 4.7 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, “Empty” from the series *Waiting*, 2008. Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.8 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, “Empty house” from the series *Waiting*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.9 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Building” from the series *Waiting*, 2007. Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.10 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, “End of the Line” from the series *Waiting*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.11 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Fence” from the series *Waiting*, 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.12 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Yellow House Two” from the series *Waiting*, 2007. Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Image 4.13 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Garden” from the series *Waiting*, 2007. Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Preface

I think it is safe to say that it takes a village to bring a PhD thesis out into the world. Thanks are due to many, starting with the funds that supported the project with financial generosity: Edda Research Centre, the School of Humanities at the University of Iceland, and the University of Iceland Eimskip Fund. I want to thank Esther Peeren for introducing me to spectrality theory when following a fascinating tutorial on the subject during my master studies at the University of Amsterdam. Peeren's inspiration has followed me throughout writing the project. I want to thank Stef Craps for accommodating me at Ghent University and for allowing to be a part of the Cultural Memory Studies Initiative (CMSI) in autumn 2017, which turned out to be a highly motivational stay and of vital importance for the project. I received an Erasmus+ grant for my stay in Belgium. I would also like to thank Gottskálk Þór Jenson for providing me with a desk at the Arnarnáttúla Institute at Copenhagen University in spring 2019, and Tea Sindbæk Andersen for accommodating me as a visiting PhD student at TORS at Copenhagen University in spring 2020 and for allowing me to take part in the organisation of the MSA Nordic inaugural symposium. My sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir, for always believing in me, the many words of encouragement and allowing me to take part in all kinds of interesting projects during my PhD studies; and to the members of my doctoral committee, Daisy Neijmann and Fionnuala Dillane, for their sharp and insightful feedback and comments. To my dear friend and PhD student partner in crime, Rósa María Hjörvar; to my parents for their support and for always trusting me; my siblings, Kári and Elín Inga, for being the best siblings one could think of, and to my grandmother, amma Inga, for introducing me to alternative perspectives on ghosts and spectres at an early age. And at last, but certainly not least, to my favourite persons on this planet, Heiðar, Sóley and Sölvi Hrafn: thank you for your everyday magic and love.

Introduction

Spectral Memory: What and why?

Iceland is full of ghosts. The haunted imagination of Icelandic culture is both rich and profound, as texts and narratives of spectral beings are to be found from the earliest accounts. One of the most famous ghosts of Icelandic cultural imagination is Glámur from the *Saga of Grettir*.¹ The story was written during the middle ages, and is considered to be a part of the *Sagas of Icelanders* that give accounts of life in Iceland after the settlement in the ninth century. Glámur was originally a pagan shepherd from Sweden, who disappeared during a storm when watching over sheep on Christmas Eve, after having rejected fasting, which was a tradition in the newly-established Christian community in Iceland at the time.² He returns from death and plagues farmers in the northern part of Iceland where he lived during his lifetime, kills sheep and wreaks havoc. Grettir, the hero of the saga, wants to test his physical and spiritual strength and fight the ghost. The fight is described in detail in a fascinating scene that ends with Grettir beating Glámur, who instead, curses him with misfortune, and states that from now on, his eyes will follow Grettir wherever he goes, which makes Grettir terrified of the dark. After the fight, Grettir is doomed to live with the curse which in the end causes him to become an outsider, and leads ultimately his death. Another well-known *spectral being* from Icelandic heritage is the “exposed new-born,” a recurrent motif from the national legends, collected in the nineteenth century; the most famous is a story titled “Móðir mín í kví” (e. Mother mine, don’t weep, weep), whose central poem has been turned into a song known by every schoolchild in Iceland.³ These are tragic and uncanny stories of young mothers who have, in their poverty, helplessness and desperation, been driven to leave their newborn infants out in the cold to perish. The dead infant later returns to haunt the mother, which usually drives the woman mad. In this particular story the woman is getting ready to go to a party but regrets not having anything fancy to wear for the occasion. At that moment she hears someone quietly singing:

Mother mine, don’t weep, weep,
As you milk the sheep, sheep;
I can lend you my rags to you,

¹ *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, trans. George Ainslie Hight (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 1929).

² Althingi, the Icelandic parliament, adopted the Christian religion in the year 1000.

³ See Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og Ævintýri* (Reykjavík : Sögufélag, 1925-1939).

So you'll go a-dancing too,
You'll go a-dancing too.⁴

The woman instantly identifies the singing voice as coming from her dead baby: the story even describes how she recognises the song as a *message* intended for her, how terrified she becomes, and her descent into insanity.

These two different narratives of spectral beings are illustrative in two senses. Firstly, they highlight the importance of hauntings and ghosts as a theme of cultural imagination in Iceland: the Sagas, to which the story of Grettir belongs, are regarded as one of the most precious cultural memories of Icelandic heritage, and every schoolchild in Iceland learns about the ghosts and spectres of the national legends. Secondly, they express a negative attitude towards spectral beings, as these stories convey how the ghost is first and foremost seen as a dangerous being with a threatening presence, illustrating how the emphasis in Icelandic narratives of hauntings is always on expelling the ghost and how to be rid of it. It is therefore fitting to say that Icelandic cultural heritage and cultural memories are ridden with narratives of *unwanted spectral presences*, or rather; *Iceland is full of ghosts*.

While ghosts are usually deemed to be enemies of the living, and hauntings something that needs to be got rid of, French philosopher Jacques Derrida, the founding father of the post-structuralist methodology of deconstruction and the initiator of *hauntology*, the scholarly discourse of haunting, states that *the spectre returns with a message*, and that it is the responsibility of the living to listen to the spectre and to establish a dialogue with it:

He [the 'scholar' of the future, the 'intellectual of tomorrow'] should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.⁵

Hauntology presents a friendly attitude towards ghosts and hauntings which aims at welcoming the ghost and understanding hauntings as a form of message. The return of the ghost can

⁴ English translation from Jacqueline Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales & Legends* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 120.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 221.

therefore be understood as a way of asking societies and cultures *to remember*. Consequently, the ghost configures forgotten, repressed or silenced *memories* of the past, or other matters that have fallen into the abyss of oblivion, temporarily escaped public attention, but return to become *re-known*. The thesis examines what I term *spectral memories* in Icelandic culture, and focuses on the interplay between memory, identity and the haunted imagination in contemporary literary texts and visual works of art. I employ the term “spectral” to define memories that have for various reasons been forgotten, silenced and repressed in the cultural psyche, but have returned to the public realm by means of contemporary art and literature. Spectrality theory, and the seminal work of Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, serve as a point of departure for the project, my initial aim being to relate the spectre to ideas of memory and theories on cultural memory studies. I argue that the spectral return offers the potential for a transformative dynamic exchange between memory and recipient, and for critical reflection on the past in order to work towards a better future. Derrida’s theories shape my understanding and approach in the discussion of *spectral memories* in the following pages, as I consider his theoretical attitude of welcoming the ghost, and emphasis on the ghost’s *spectral message*, constructive when analysing Icelandic hauntings which express the common attitude of considering the ghost as an enemy and expelling it. Thus when recounting the two classical ghost stories in the opening to this introduction, I propose projecting a spectral reading onto them, which means approaching them as memory narratives, where the spectral being, Glámur and the exposed new-born, configure a repressed memory of a wrongdoing that returns and asks to be remembered.

From the point of view of anthropology, Christophe Pons discusses the ghost story and states that the term “folk belief” describes culturally-based attitudes of a nation: a mindset that is collective to a nation and becomes a distinctive feature of its culture.⁶ The ghost theme in Icelandic heritage, national legends and medieval sagas is a clear example of cultural memory that is not only bound to certain texts from the collective past, but also impacts a collective understanding and attitude towards certain phenomena in the present. In *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility*, Esther Peeren stresses how the term spectre does not always refer to the same thing and how not all ghosts are the same. Spectres have different representational functions, as well as meaning, power and effect, depending on the context. Glámur, in the story of Grettir, is a classical ghost of Icelandic heritage and reflects

⁶ Christophe Pons, “Gegn þjóðtrú. Draugasaga í mannfræðilegu ljósi”, trans. Irma Erlingsdóttir, *Skírnir* 1/1998, 143-163.

how the word “ghost” tends to have negative connotations in the Icelandic language, by being close to terms such as “fjandi” which translates as “enemy” or “devil”.⁷ The ghosts of the medieval sagas appear as physical beings, corpses that are resurrected and come to life, as well as being spiteful, malicious and violent. The new-born infant, exposed and left to die, is a different kind of ghost, and relates more strongly to the word “spectre,” which has different connotations from “ghost”. In my view, addressing this terminology, the various words used to describe spectral beings, can help to distinguish between types of hauntings and, to a certain extent, explain how people understand and react to hauntings. While “ghosts” and “hauntings” appear as overly charged terms, spectre is more neutral yet intriguing in its mysteriousness: “Specter and Spectrality have a more serious scholarly ring to them than ghost and ghostliness but specifically evoke an etymological link to visibility and vision, to that which is both looked at (as fascinating spectacle) and looking (in the sense of examining), suggests their suitability for explaining and illuminating phenomena, other than the putative return of the dead.”⁸ Derrida addresses the difference between spectre and ghost in the following manner:

What distinguishes the spectre or the *revenant* from the *spirit*, including the spirit in the sense of a ghost in general, is doubtless a supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible, or an invisibility of a visible X, that *non-senuous sensuous* of which *Capital* speaks (we will come to this) with regard to a certain exchange-value; it is also, no doubt, the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone *other*.⁹

For Derrida, and due to the neutrality of the term, *spectre* has more metaphorical potential than *spirit* or *ghost*, due to its paradoxical form of being visible yet invisible, tangible yet intangible, embodied yet spiritual. The same goes for the Icelandic word “vofa” (spectre) and its adjective “vofulegur” (spectral) which have more neutral connotations than “draugur” (ghost). *Vofa* is defined as being a “spirit of a deceased man” and more precisely, in Icelandic folk belief, *vofa*

⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, “Íslenskir draugar frá landnámi til lúterstrúar. Inngangur að draugafræðum”, *Skírnir* 1/2010, 187-210.

⁸ Esther Peeren and María del Pilar Blanco, “Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities” in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1-27, 2.

⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 6.

is deemed to refer to a supernatural being that is “less tangible and not as harmful as ghost.”¹⁰ A spectre is thus perceived as an apparition of a deceased person and a harmless presence, but its relations to the terms “yfirvofandi” (e. *imminent*) and “vofa yfir” (e. *loom threateningly*) should also be highlighted, as they both indicate the anticipation of the apparition of the spectre, how it is bound to return, as well as an etymological relation to “imminent threat” – that which bears with it something dangerous and frightening. The latter approaches the idea of the *uncanny* that arouses anxiety and fear by carrying an undefined or defamiliarised danger.¹¹ In the story about the infant, and unlike the physical, zombie-like Glámur-ghost, the spectre makes its presence known with an intangible voice, and instead of violently attacking the haunted woman, it presents a different kind of threat in the form of an eerie message that frightens the woman into insanity. The legend opens up to various critical interpretations – a feminist analysis would perhaps be the most adequate – but one evident reading is from the viewpoint of memory: the baby ghost signals the traumatic memory, a hidden secret, dark deed and sense of guilt, which the woman wants above all to forget, but persists in being remembered. In this context, the spectre has a frightening presence and carries with it an upsetting truth from the past.

Spectrality theory, and the scholarly discourse of *spectralities*, uses the *spectre* as a theoretical concept and an analytical instrument, and the initial aim of this project was to explore the encounter of spectrality theory and Icelandic culture, which at the time I believed to be specifically ridden with stories of hauntings and ghostly national legends, and where, I had been told, beliefs in the supernatural among inhabitants were thought to be more prevalent than elsewhere. The encounter, however, brought me onto a different path: stories of ghosts and hauntings are more universal phenomena than I thought in the beginning, which gives them a transcultural dimension. And even though localised themes and specificities can be depicted, they often seem to follow certain fashions and trends. Instead, I started to look for particular areas and periods in Icelandic culture that were *spectral* and *haunted* in the more metaphorical sense: where the spectre as a conceptual metaphor signals matters that have returned, giving them the paradoxical status of being simultaneously present and absent. That observation brought me to the blind spots of memory: on the one hand to memories that return from the past to disturb mainstream notions and homogenous ideas on identity, and on the other, how specific periods have produced *spectral* cultural responses. The first part of the thesis explores how the

¹⁰ “vofa”, *Snara* online dictionary, <https://snara.is/> (accessed 23.1.2020).

¹¹ See Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919) trans. Alix Strachey, in *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), I will discuss the concept in more detail in the later parts of the thesis.

archive becomes the storage space for spectral memories, whereas the second part examines the spectral cultural memories following the financial crash and crisis in Iceland in 2008. In both parts I look at narratives and images that prove to be *haunted* by repressed memories, which impacts how the present-day identity is conceived, illustrating the intricate connections between memory, identity and the haunted imagination.

In both stories described in the opening of this introduction, the ghost is seen as something that brings with it something harmful and dangerous, indicating how living subjects fear spectral encounters and seek to be rid of all ghosts. Icelandic ghost stories thus follow a wider Western tradition where the emphasis is always on expelling spectral creatures and repressing their presence. But what does this discussion of spectral repression and return have to do with memory? Memory appears as one of those phenomena that seem to be hard to define or describe, due to its intangible nature, making it easily escape definitions and categorisations. A case in point is how memory has since antiquity been configured with the use of multiple and different metaphors. In the *Art of Memory* from 1966, a book that has been a constant source of inspiration for memory scholars, Frances Yates describes the many different metaphorical forms memory has taken: with the classical metaphor of the wax tablet in antiquity indicating how memory, like the text written on the wax tablet, slowly fades with time, and how memory, like running water or a flowing river, cannot resist the inevitable passing of time.¹² The spectre is yet another metaphor, but I use it to define a specific kind of memory, or rather a particular *part* of memory, where the passing away and the return become the attributes of a very specific type of memories that are not (allowed to be) part of the *canonical* cultural memory.

What is cultural memory?

Cultural memory studies is an interdisciplinary field that explores how memory is constructed and mediated within a society or a culture. Its origins can be drawn from the 1920s, to the theories of Maurice Halbwachs (among others) and his term *collective memory*, that emphasises how all memory is *social*, thus first and foremost based on communal interaction, and how individuals create memories and remember with the aid of the frames of society.¹³ The impact

¹² Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966). Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir also discusses the many metaphors in *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 4.

¹³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed., trans., and with introduction by Lewis A. Coser, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Social frames (fr. cadres sociaux) are other people, the social group and social interaction, as Astrid Erll explains: “the fact that it is through interaction and communication with our fellow humans that we acquire knowledge about dates and facts, collective concepts of time and space, and ways of thinking and experiencing. [...] Metaphorically speaking, cadres sociaux are thought patterns, cognitive

of Halbwachs' writings did, however, not manifest until later, or during the second phase of memory studies in the 1980s, when Aleida and Jan Assmann, along with other academics, started to introduce his ideas into the field of modern memory and cultural studies. The Assmanns have further developed Halbwachs' ideas, by distinguishing between *communicative memory* and *cultural memory*.¹⁴ The term "cultural" may be misleading, as both forms of memory have to do with culture: Communicative memory "lives in everyday interaction and communication" and emerges by means of language and physical action, such as behaviour and gestures.¹⁵ It has a lifespan of eighty to a hundred years, or the time that generations can share and interact with each other: for example, generations that experience certain events, and share memories of them that will disappear naturally when the individuals of the generations die. Cultural memory, on the other hand, covers a broader timespan than communicative memory, as it often refers to a distant past. It does not rely on a specific social group of living people and does not concern everyday knowledge or social skills. Cultural memory is an institutionalised form of memory that is "exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent [...]"¹⁶ It is socially constructed and serves the purpose of creating unity and identity among cultural and social groups, for example, nations. Jan Assmann coined the term in an essay in 1995, defining it as following:

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.¹⁷

Cultural memory is therefore strongly linked to cultural identities, highlighting how cultural groups base their unity on remembering. While communicative memory is more spontaneous,

schemata, that guide our perception and memory in particular directions." *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 15.

¹⁴ See for example Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory", *Cultural Memory Studies: An Interdisciplinary and International Handbook*, eds. A. Erll and A. Nünning, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 109-119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

¹⁷ Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" trans. John Czaplicka. *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125-33, 132. Available online: doi:10.2307/488538 [Accessed: January 23, 2020] Originally published in German in 1988, Erll, 24.

modifiable, negotiable and unofficial, Astrid Erll defines cultural memory as more fixed and official, staged and stylised: “the societal construction of normative and formative versions of the past.”¹⁸ Cultural memory and political identity are closely entwined, and based on formative and normative texts, according to J. Assmann: “Normative texts codify the norms of social behaviour. Formative texts formulate the self-image of the group and the knowledge that secures their identity.”¹⁹ This highlights how cultural memory is intertwined with power structures, tensions even, and hierarchies, and how dependent it is on selection: while one chooses to remember some matters, one simultaneously chooses to forget others.²⁰ This is evident in how memory is used to construct identity; on the personal level as a self-image and selfhood that is based on individual remembering, as well as on the collective one, for example in terms of national identity and nationhood which is thus based on collective remembrance. John R. Gillis explains: “The parallel lives of these two terms [memory and identity] alert us to the fact that the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.”²¹ Memory is used to create a sense of unity and memories are selected to support an agreement about the formation of identity; how a group sees themselves collectively in the eyes of others. To give a more concrete example, Icelanders, for instance, use specific memories as foundational symbols for their national identity; such as memories that express acts of heroism related to the campaign for independence.²²

Pierre Nora’s concept *lieux de mémoire*, or memory sites, is also a part of the second phase of memory studies in the nineteen-eighties, that has appeared as a leitmotif in later texts on cultural memory.²³ The term does not only apply to a *site* in the traditional sense, but to objects, abstract as well as concrete, that are culturally symbolic, represent a specific memory

¹⁸ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 30.

¹⁹ Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Palo Alto US: Stanford University Press, 2006), 104. Erll states that the former answers the question ‘what should we do?’ and the latter ‘who are we?’ Erll, 34.

²⁰ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive” in *Cultural Memory Studies. An Interdisciplinary and International Handbook*, ed. A. Erll and A. Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 97-108.

²¹ John R. Gillis “Introduction: Memory and Identity: History of a Relationship” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1994), 3-24, 3.

²² I will discuss this in more depth in chapter three and refer to historian Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, who has analysed nation building and identity construction in Iceland at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur: Þjóðerni, kyngervi og vald á Íslandi 1900-1930* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2004).

²³ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire” in *Memory and Counter-Memory*, eds. Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-24.

and become important for the construction of identity.²⁴ Or, as Nora states: “the most symbolic objects of our memory: to the archives as well as to the tricolor [the French flag]: to the libraries, dictionaries, and museums as well as to commemorations, celebrations, the Pantheon and the Arc de Triomphe[.]”²⁵ Thus memory sites can be memorials and monuments as well as literature, museums, memorial days and historical persons, and other phenomena that share the purpose of interrupting the constant flow of time, working against forgetting and creating as much meaning with as few signs as possible.²⁶ A memory site has a unifying function, preventing the circulation of incoherent memories, and creating a communal frame of reference to discuss the past. Ann Rigney suggests that one should not think about the memory site as a static entity, but rather as a *mnemonic process*: “Sites of memory are constantly being reinvested with new meaning and thus become a self-perpetuation vortex of symbolic investment.”²⁷ Rigney advocates the *dynamics* of memory sites, a research attitude which follows the overall emphasis on processes in cultural studies, where academics focus on the circulation of cultural products and how they impact on their environment.²⁸ In this sense cultural memory is “an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites.”²⁹ The concept *remediation* offers a viewpoint on how a memory site is constructed in the beginning, and how it is transformed or maintained with continuous representations at different times and in different media.³⁰ Or as Erll and Rigney state in the introduction to *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, remediation describes the “repeated media representations [...] which ‘converge and coalesce’ into a *lieu de mémoire*, which create, stabilize and consolidate, but then also critically reflect upon and renew these sites.”³¹ Remediation reflects how the

²⁴ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 172.

²⁵ Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, 12.

²⁶ See how Laura Basu discusses the memory site in “Towards a Memory Dispositif: Truth, Myth and the Ned Kelly *lieu de mémoire*, 1890-1930” in *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, eds. Astrid Erll & Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012) 139-156, 140.

²⁷ Ann Rigney, “Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory” in *Journal of European Studies* (35:1) 2005, 11-28, 18.

²⁸ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 27. Rigney, “The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts between Monumentality and Morphing” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An Interdisciplinary and International Handbook*, 346.

²⁹ Erll and Rigney, “Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics” in *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, 1-11, 2.

³⁰ Erll, “Remembering across Time, Space and Cultures: Premediation, Remediation and the ‘Indian Mutiny’” in *Mediation, Remediation and Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, 109-138, 111.

³¹ Erll and Rigney, 5.

embedded value or meaning of the memory site is never static but constantly changing.³² In this regard, the interactions between memory and identity constructions are highlighted, suggesting how memory is used to serve present-day identity, which is adjusted to the norms and values of each period.

The emphasis on dynamics in cultural memory studies highlights how memory is simultaneously based on remembering and forgetting. While Erll states that remembering and forgetting are two sides of the same memory-coin, Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir maintains that: “in order to remember, one must have forgotten; the forgotten is always already an integral part of memory.”³³ Aleida Assmann stresses the role of forgetting in memory activities, by stating that a continuous process of forgetting is part of social normality, while the act of remembering is the exception, and usually a costly one in the form of institutions, regulations, memorial sites and museums.³⁴ Memory capacity, both human as well as the cultural means of storing memory, is highly limited which points to the immense quantity of memories that are forgotten and lost. One can imagine that some of these memories are simply not memorable enough to be remembered, such as scenes from everyday life, but this limit of memory capacity also results in the repression or displacement of memories that are complex or problematic, and therefore difficult to memorialise, mediate or narrativise.³⁵ In chapter one I discuss how the archive, conceptualised by A. Assmann as representing *storage memory*, becomes the storage place of such memories that are left aside, silenced or repressed, but have the potential of returning to public attention. Forgetting is often equated with silence. Jay Winter, however, wants to differentiate between silence and forgetting by emphasising that silence entails agency: something is not addressed for some particular, often political, reasons.³⁶ Forgetting is, however, a more neutral term for Winter: something falls out of frames of attention, unintentionally, because it is accidentally overlooked. While silencing appears very intentional, when something is forgotten on purpose, forgetting is a more complicated term and can be both intentional and unintentional. Paul Connerton distinguishes, for example, between seven types

³² Thus, highlighting cultural memory as a dynamic and in continuous process: “memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals, and in the process, create communality across both space and time.” Erll and Rigney, “Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics”, 1.

³³ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 8. Guðmundsdóttir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life-Writing*, 1.

³⁴ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive” in *Cultural Memory Studies. An Interdisciplinary and International Handbook*, 97-108, 98.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁶ See Jay Winter, “Thinking about Silence,” *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3 - 31, 4.

of forgetting, highlighting how forgetting has its constructive sides as well as its destructive aspects.³⁷ *Repressive erasure, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment* and *forgetting as humiliated silence* belong to the destructive side of forgetting, emphasising the political function of forgetting, when it is performed to protect one's interests or cover up for misdeeds and injustice. The same applies to *forgetting as planned obsolescence*, which according to Connerton is integrated in our modern capitalist society of consumption.³⁸ Constructive forms of forgetting are *prescriptive forgetting*, that describes how parties in conflict decide to set matters aside in order to continue towards the future, and *forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of new identity*, when people decide to forget memories to make space for new ones, for example when starting a new life after a divorce or any other kind of disruptive event.³⁹

Thus in my discussion of spectral memories it is important to *try* to make a distinction between memories that have been silenced (actively and intentionally forgotten), repressed (actively set aside or buried in the unconsciousness) or forgotten, that, as Connerton's conceptualisation shows, does not always mean the same thing. However, I say *try* to make this distinction as, in my analysis, it is not always evident whether certain memories have been silenced, repressed, or inactively forgotten by having fallen passively out of frames of attention. This especially applies to the archived memories in chapter one and two, where I discuss the ambiguous two-fold function of the archive as memorialising as well as repressing. In the latter part of the thesis, in the discussion of the financial crash and crisis in Iceland in 2008, I will look at how these specific events produce complicated and problematic memories that are contested or conflicted, which leads to their silencing, repression, and therefore forgetting. These are memories that become spectral due to their return; they are not part of the public cultural memory but not entirely lost either. However, to be able to *haunt* living subjects, they necessitate agency, which prompts the following question that is central to my investigation: How do memories acquire agency and become haunting?

Spectral memory as a dynamic and transformative encounter between past and present

What does the spectre do for or add to the extensive field of cultural memory studies that proves to be already rich in material? The spectre returns with a message, states Derrida, and I argue that spectral memories are to be considered messages from the past, that for some reason have been forgotten but demand to be remembered. The return of the spectre indicates an encounter

³⁷ Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting", *Memory Studies* 1: 2008: 59-71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 62 – 63.

between past and present, therefore offering the possibility of a transformative and dynamic exchange between memory and recipient, as memory comes into being through reception. In terms of identity, spectral memories that return to haunt indicate how the present-day identity may be misleading and deceptive, by being based on illusions, myths or narratives that are too one-sided or biased; memories that only celebrate or serve the purpose of one distinctive cultural group.

The “spectral” part of spectral memories refers to spectralities, the constantly broadening theoretical discourse drawing on the *spectre* as a central concept. According to Esther Peeren, author of *The Spectral Metaphor* and one of two editors of *The Spectralities Reader*, Roger Luckhurst introduced the term *spectral turn* in 2002 to describe the academic trend of using the spectre as an analytical instrument.⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida is the main catalyst of the turn, but Derrida’s elaboration of *hauntology* presented in *Spectres de Marx* from 1993 lies at the heart of spectralities, indicating how scholars, following Derrida’s lead, seek to build their discussion of spectralities by either referring to, answering or opposing hauntology.⁴¹ The term “hauntology” (Fr. *hantologie*) is created from the words “haunting” and “ontology”, as Derrida states: “Let us call it hauntology. This logic of haunting would not merely be larger and more powerful than ontology or a thinking of Being (of the ‘to be,’ assuming that it is a matter of Being in the ‘to be or not to be,’ but nothing less certain).”⁴² *Spectres de Marx* is based on a lecture Derrida gave in two sessions, April 22 and 23, 1993, at the University of California, Riverside, on the occasion of an international colloquium entitled “Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective,” indicating how it is first and foremost Derrida’s reaction to the spectral state of the legacy of Marxism during the neo-liberal nineties that is at stake.⁴³ Derrida draws similarities between the spectral presence of Marx in academia and the ghost of the father in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The father’s ghost appears to young Hamlet in order to inform him about the dark deeds of his brother, who is now king of Denmark, and to tell him the truth about his own death.⁴⁴ After the apparition of the spectre, Hamlet understands that it is his duty to listen to the spectre and to obey its injunction, that is, to revenge his murder. At

⁴⁰ Roger Luckhurst, “The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the ‘Spectral Turn’”, *Textual Practices* (16:3) 2002, 527-36. Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 10-11.

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L’État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993.

⁴² Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10.

⁴³ “Notes on the Text”, *ibid.*, xiii.

⁴⁴ “As in *Hamlet*, the prince of a rotten state, everything begins by the apparition of a spectre. More precisely by the *waiting* of this apparition. The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing (“this thing”) will end up coming.” *Ibid.*, 2.

that moment he says: “The time is out of joint. O, cursed spite / that ever I was born to set it right!”⁴⁵ These words become a leitmotif in Derrida’s text; the first part of the sentence “time is out of joint” describes the temporal anachronism created by the presence of the spectre, when it returns from death to the world of the living: “Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted. Says Hamlet.”⁴⁶ The spectre incorporates the fusion or merging of two different time-periods and the intrusion of the past into the present.

Peeren states that projects under the umbrella of the spectral turn engage with the “spectre” by employing it as a central metaphor and share certain emphases.⁴⁷ The first is the fundamental idea of the spectre as a *figure of return*. Or, as Derrida states: “A question of *repetition*: a spectre is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.”⁴⁸ The return of the spectre is its fundamental feature and describes how it possesses the ability to express “the persistence of the past in the present.”⁴⁹ Secondly, the spectre is seen as indicating the presence of an absence. In the words of Peeren “something is *there*” that has been overlooked or dismissed, but needs a response or at least a reaction: “affective impacts of ‘reknowing’ or ‘unforgetting’ phenomena previously overlooked or unprocessed, ranging from the empty spaces in buildings to personal or national traumas.”⁵⁰ What is important is how these forgotten matters are not made present in a “straightforward manner,” according to Peeren, but: “manifest in and as their absence, so that their escaping notice remains part of their signification.”⁵¹ In her writings, Peeren focuses on the political dimension of spectralities and how they can be beneficial for matters that are overlooked or dispossessed in the present, such as missing persons or undocumented migrants, *figures of vulnerability* who have what she defines as *spectral agency*.⁵² The future orientation of spectralities is also rising, especially in light of climate change, as the possibility of the no-

⁴⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene 5.

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 20.

⁴⁷ Peeren and del Pilar Blanco stress that spectralities is neither a field nor a discipline, not even a method. Instead it should be described as an attitude that has produced scholarly discourse and therefore a theory, where spectre and haunting are used as conceptual metaphors and become analytical instruments. *The Spectralities Reader*, 9.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

⁴⁹ Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10. Here Peeren refers to Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xviii.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10. “This relates to the third focus of the spectral turn that can be related to postmodern attitudes and perspectives, where the spectre ‘escapes the totalizing logic of conventional cognitive operations’ and ‘insists on blurring multiple borders between visibility and invisibility, past and present, life and death, presence and absence, reality and imagination.”

⁵² Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 14.

future presses human subjects to act in the present.⁵³ Spectralities therefore present a strong socio-ethical-political angle, which is of great importance when I relate the spectre to memory and memory studies. I build my analysis on the “past-orientation” of spectralities, as Derrida draws strong connections between spectral presence on the one hand, and public memory on the other: “So it would be necessary [...] to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without the commerce of ghosts. [...] And this being-with spectres would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance of generations.”⁵⁴ Unlike traditional narratives about ghosts and hauntings in the Western world, that usually aim at exorcising the ghost and being rid of its presence, Derrida highlights the importance of learning how to live with spectres, or as Peeren and del Pilar Blanco state: “rather than being expelled, the ghost should remain, be lived *with* as a conceptual metaphor signalling the disjointedness of ontology, history, inheritance, materiality and ideology.”⁵⁵ The spectre becomes a gateway between the past and the present, as memory of past events comes into being in the present in “disjointed” ways. In some cases spectres become metaphors for problematic memories: “Marx had his ghosts, we have ours, but memories no longer recognize such borders; by definition, they pass through walls, these revenants, day and night, they trick consciousness and skip generations.”⁵⁶ Here Derrida equates ghosts with memories, highlighting how memory, in its dynamic nature and as a spectre, moves beyond borders.

By adding the adjective “spectral” to memory, specific attributes are emphasised and highlighted. *Spectral* describes memories that possess the ambiguous status of being simultaneously present and absent. Spectral memories are not visible in the public sphere, as they are not formally part of the institutionalised cultural memory. Or, to be more precise, they are not part of the public domain of cultural memory but, as I will discuss in chapter one, cultural memory has one public side and another not-as-public side, distinguished by Aleida Assmann with the terms “canon” and “archive,” representing active working memory and passive storage memory.⁵⁷ I will argue that the archive becomes the storage space of spectral

⁵³ Peeren, “Attending to Ghosts: Cultural Analysis, Close Reading and the Cultural Imagination” inaugural lecture 611 delivered on 27 September 2019, published in the series of the University of Amsterdam, 4-21, 7
Available online: https://www.uva.nl/onderzoek/onderzoek-aan-de-uva/hoogleraren/oratiegallery/2019/oraties-2019.html?fbclid=IwAR34hZgmlm_x6RrXlHyKReU1uWI7_NygvB8NBxnVQwvly0zABbYPTTHKink
[accessed 23.1.2020]

⁵⁴ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 15.

⁵⁵ Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, 7.

⁵⁶ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 36.

⁵⁷ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive”, 98-99.

memories, where dispossessed memories are allowed to persist in spectral ways: hidden far away from the public's attention, but not entirely lost. Their location in the archive opens up for the possibility of return and thus for haunting: in the attempt to be re-known. Secondly, *spectral* refers to a "return," emphasising the dynamic process of memory and describing memories that once were forgotten, either silenced or displaced, repressed, but have returned to public attention.

But how do memories acquire this ability to return? How do memories go from being spectral to becoming haunting? Peeren emphasises the reaction of the living that makes haunting possible: "This shifts the focus from the ethico-political choice to be made once a haunting has been established – between trying to exorcise the ghost and learning to live with it – to the ethico-political question of which hauntings we, through the distribution of our attention and inattention, make possible or impossible."⁵⁸ In this sense, spectralities is initially about the *encounter* between living subjects and spectral matters, where the former must allow for the meeting to take place by attending to matters that are only partially present and thus simultaneously absent. In terms of memory, I would like to emphasise the spectral return as a dynamic exchange between memory and recipient, as spectrality refers to an encounter between subjects living in the present and forgotten memories of the past. Here I draw similarities between "encounter" and "reception," highlighting how cultural memory comes into being by means of reception, as well as stressing how it needs to be active. Spectrality is about agency, not only the agency of the spectre – what is the ghost capable of and what not – but also the agency of the living: how do they respond to spectres? It therefore stresses the importance of agency in terms of memory, as well as its selective nature, not only in the decision to remember or to forget, but also in the decision to recollect forgotten memories, and trying to understand why these memories were forgotten at some point. Spectrality describes how memories can become haunting: when they acquire agency and can make themselves known to the living as well as pressing for active reaction and a critical response. To answer the question posed by the end of the earlier section, how do memories haunt, I refer to Peeren's statement: memories haunt if living subjects allow them to haunt, and more precisely, if they decide to attend to spectral memories, and enable their possibility of haunting in order to call for a reaction or response. Finally, what is also important in the encounter between spectrality and memory is the emphasis on the future. The spectre configures a merging of past, present and future, as it is not only a *revenant*, who returns from the past, but also an *arrivant*, announcing a progressive

⁵⁸ Peeren, "Attending to Ghosts", 9.

move towards the future and highlighting how acts performed in the present, as reactions in the aftermath of past events, influence the course of what is yet to come. As Derrida illustrates in *Specters of Marx*: “those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born.”⁵⁹ Instead of becoming stuck in a melancholic aspect of memory, that only looks back at the past, one has the potential of influencing the future in a progressive way by responding responsibly to the haunting of spectres.

One issue must be addressed immediately and as straightforwardly as possible: the very obvious connections between spectral memory and traumatic memory, leading to the question: why not pursue trauma studies instead of spectralities? While there are commonalities between the two, and while the spectre has been employed as a metaphor for trauma, to the point that Luckhurst calls it a cliché, not all spectral memories are traumatic memories.⁶⁰ Not all forgotten memories are traumatic memories, just as matters that somehow escape memory, refuse to be *easily* narrativised and memorialised, are not all the aftermaths of traumatic events.⁶¹ While trauma is inflected with repressed memories in the family archives in the novels analysed in chapter two, where I discuss traumatic memories more thoroughly, the colonial memories as well as the memories of protests discussed in chapter one are not necessarily traumatic. In addition, it is not fitting, in my opinion, to refer to the financial crash in Iceland as a traumatic event, because that simplifies it to a certain extent: while the impacts of the crash were traumatic for some, who for example lost their jobs, homes and health due to economic difficulties, for many others the collapse of the banks represented a “mnemonic disruption,” and a collective ideological shock, instead of a violent or physically harmful event.

The encounter between spectralities and memory leads us to another important meeting: the one between theory and case studies, which in my case are both literary texts and visual works of art. I refer to my analysis as *spectral reading* to draw attention to how I am reading,

⁵⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 12.

⁶⁰ “the ghost as figure of trauma has become almost a cliché, reinforced as it was throughout the 1990s by an elaborate critical discourse of spectres and ‘spectrality’” Luckhurst, *Trauma Question*, 93. From: Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, 15.

⁶¹ See how for example Lucy Bond and Stef Craps explain traumatic memory in their Routledge guide to *Trauma*, by referring to Cathy Caruth: “Van der Kolk and van der Hart [who have conducted neurobiological research on trauma] argue that a traumatic event elides its normal encoding in memory; it is stored differently and hence cannot become what Janet terms a ‘narrative memory’ that is integrated into the individual’s life story. For Janet, the goal of therapy is to convert ‘traumatic memory’, which merely repeats the past and is removed from conscious awareness and voluntary control, into ‘narrative memory’ which narrates the past as past.” *Trauma* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 58. See Caruth, “Recapturing the Past: Introduction” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 151-7, 151. I will discuss Caruth’s theories on trauma in chapter two in relation to postmemory.

in the broadest sense of that word – receiving, interpreting, examining – the artworks, from a specific theoretical standpoint illustrated in the term *spectral memories*. Instead of applying a toolbox of analytical instruments to the works of art, spectral reading looks for connections and ruptures between the theories and the artworks, by looking at how the artworks respond to the theory. Spectral reading follows the emphasis expressed in *close reading*, a method known within cultural studies that seeks to let artworks speak theoretically in their own right.⁶² It allows an analysis of works that use different media, texts and images, and describes a particular position in the reception and analysis of different cultural memory objects that become cultural texts in the broadest sense of the word.

Outline of chapters

The thesis consists of two main parts. Part I examines how the archive becomes a storage space for *spectral memories* that are not part of the canonical cultural memory, are not visible in the public sphere, but not entirely lost either. The archive appears to have a very ambiguous function, and Derrida conceptualises “archive fever” (Fr. mal d’archive) as the desire or need to simultaneously remember and repress, in an article that shares many similarities with his ideas expressed in *Spectres de Marx*.⁶³ Chapter one focuses on *archival art*, where visual artists seek material and inspirations from institutional archives. These memories return by means of the artists who allow them to become haunting by exhibiting them to present-day viewers with the aim of disturbing their peace: encouraging them to reflect critically on the communal past and reconsider their collective identities of the present. The series of photographs by Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique* and *Das Experiment Island*, portray research objects from two different anthropological studies that were performed on Icelanders, and show them in light of colonialism, evoking the little-discussed colonial memory of Iceland.⁶⁴ The series open up a discussion on the strong colonial connotations of the archive, as well as its uncanny and spectral associations. The second case study of chapter one is the artwork *Traces* by Unnar Örn Auðarson, where the artist presents photographs from institutional archives portraying the aftermaths of different protests in Iceland.⁶⁵ When exhibiting these photographs, the artist has

⁶² See for example: Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

⁶³ Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25:2/1995. Originally published as *Mal d’Archive Une impression freudienne* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1995).

⁶⁴ Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique* and *Das Experiment Island*. Series of photographs, 2012.

⁶⁵ Unnar Örn Auðarson, “Traces” from the exhibition *Fragments of the Deeds of Unrest: Part II* at ASÍ Art Museum 2014.

juxtaposed them with iconic images of cultural memory, creating a tension between memories that are known and public, and the memories that are unknown and hidden. The artwork demonstrates how the artist conjures up the spectre by not only drawing out hidden and lost memories from the shadowy storage space of the archive and into the daylight of the exhibition gallery, but also enables the abstract potential of the archived document. This makes *Traces* a highly interesting example of spectral memories. Chapter two also centres on the archive, but marks a shift in focus in two ways: from visual artworks to literary texts, and from the public domain to the more private intergenerational memory of families. Firstly, I focus on the function of the family archive for a writer who is writing the story of his family, in *Fórnarleikar* by Álfur Gunnlaugsdóttir.⁶⁶ The archive represents disembodied memories that the writer has inherited from his mother, which relates strongly to what Marianne Hirsch has termed *post-memory*.⁶⁷ The post-memorial family archive seems to simultaneously influence as well as complicate the fictional life-writing process. The second novel, entitled *Elín, ýmislegt* by Kristín Eiríksdóttir, tells the story of a woman who is forced to recollect repressed memories when going through three cardboard boxes that contain various objects from her childhood.⁶⁸ In my analysis, I examine the mnemonic function of the cardboard boxes: how they introduce spectral memories to the narrative, and memory objects that start to *haunt* the protagonist, calling for an active reaction on her part in order to resolve unsettled matters.

The second part of the thesis examines how specific historical events produce spectral memories: more precisely, how the financial crash and crisis in Iceland in 2008 initiated a type of *spectral* cultural responses. This second part consists of two chapters where I focus on how these spectral memories appear in culture, art and literature, as well as trying to figure out *why* they appear. My theory is that the spectral-uncanny aesthetics of the artworks express, at this specific point in time, a state that I refer to as *spectral mourning*; how the loss starts haunting the subject. Chapter three focuses on the literary responses to the crash and crisis where I analyse two different examples of spectral texts: the first one is *I Remember You* by crime writer Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, which is more a horror ghost story than classical crime fiction, and became immensely popular during the aftermath of the crisis.⁶⁹ It tells the story of three characters who

⁶⁶ Álfur Gunnlaugsdóttir, *Fórnarleikar* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2016).

⁶⁷ See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997) and *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁶⁸ Kristín Eiríksdóttir, *A Fist or a Heart*, English trans. Larissa Kyzer (Seattle: AmazonCrossing, 2019). Originally published as *Elín, ýmislegt* (Reykjavík, JPV útgáfa, 2017).

⁶⁹ Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, *I Remember You: A Ghost Story*, English trans. Philip Roughton (New York: Minotaur Books, 2012). Originally published: *Ég man þig* (Reykjavík: Veröld, 2010).

decide to renovate an old abandoned house in a remote location, without knowing that it is haunted by a hostile being. The analysis focusses on the haunting, how it is represented and how it is responded to, in order to examine how it relates to or embodies the characters' process of mourning: what are the reasons behind the haunting and why are these characters haunted? The second example is the novel *Hvítfeld – fjölskyldusaga* by Kristín Eiríksdóttir, a highly uncanny story about a family in mourning after the sudden death of the youngest daughter.⁷⁰ Reading *Hvítfeld* spectrally means examining *how* and *why* the characters are haunted by their sudden loss, as well as how they respond differently to their feelings of loss, regret and failed responsibility, which results in an uncanny family life and surroundings. The fourth and final chapter of the thesis examines two visual cultural responses to the crash and crisis that document how the collapse of the economic system left uncanny marks on the cityscape in Reykjavík. These are untitled series of drawings by Guðjón Ketilsson from his exhibition *Roles*, as well as series of photographs by Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, titled *Waiting*.⁷¹ Projecting a *spectral reading* onto the two series means examining how their uncanny aesthetics express a moment of haunting following the economic collapse, and asking what constitutes the haunting at this specific moment in time. In this case, spectral reading allows for a moment of active remembrance: for slowing down the constant dynamics of the urban space in order to unravel and reflect on the memories that lie behind the grey concrete structures, as well as accounting for how the spectral aesthetics of the series express a moment of melancholia or mourning that becomes spectral and takes on the form of haunting. But what constitutes the haunting, who is haunted, and by what or whom?

These different types of case studies, archival art pieces, archival fictions, horror ghost story, family saga, and series of drawings or photographs, demonstrate a broad range of cultural artefacts that deal with memory that is spectral, haunted or haunting, and impacts identity. They therefore demonstrate explicitly the intricate relations between memory, identity and haunted imagination. What connects them further is how they concretise the haunted memory in space, and with the creation of *spectral space*; the damaged buildings of authority on the images in *Traces* by Unnar Örn Auðarson suggest how the official and public memory is contested or haunted; the family homes in the archival fictions are haunted by the traumatic memories they keep, just as the half-built houses left by the financial crash are haunted due to multiple repressions of responsibility, guilt and shame. Even the colonial memories in Nordal's artworks

⁷⁰ Kristín Eiríksdóttir, *Hvítfeld: Fjölskyldusaga* (Reykjavík: JPV, 2012).

⁷¹ Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled series of drawings, 2009 and Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, *Waiting* series of photographs, from 2006.

suggest how institutions keep haunting memories in their storage spaces, and the spectral spaces portrayed by Ketilsson and Ragnarsson document a historical moment of haunting. The spectral space becomes a concrete symbol and a setting for a haunted memory, suggesting how the identity it presents is contaminated and needs to be re-evaluated.

In all the case studies, I seek to analyse how the *spectre* returns from the past to disturb the present and to provoke a dynamic and transformative memory encounter, by establishing a link between haunting and identity, both on the personal and the collective level. In this regard, the artworks respond directly to the title of the thesis, *Spectral Memories of Icelandic Culture: Memory, Identity and the Haunted Imagination in Contemporary Literature and Art*, by being creative, fictional and imaginative cultural responses to memory that is spectral or haunted, thus creating preconditions and altering how identity is perceived and constructed. The thesis is ethical-political in its orientation, as my analysis aims at unpacking how the artworks encode critiques or politics of memory and identity, from various collective and individual perspectives. This brings together the key research questions to which the rest of the thesis responds: in what way does the spectre return to critique or supplement the self, i.e. on the personal level as well as on the collective national level in terms of nationhood and national identity? How do spectral spaces, such as damaged official buildings of power, haunted houses, homes and ruins, express identities that are haunted? How does the spectre express the contradictions and paradoxes that lie at the heart of Icelandic cultural memories, and how is this related to the *fear* usually associated with spectral beings? How can melancholia and repression, expressed by the presence of the spectre, be transformed into its opposite, allowing subjects to explore the potentiality of the spectral return as a dynamic memory encounter? These questions will guide my discussion and analysis in the following pages.

Part I

Spectral Memories from the Archive

This first part of the thesis studies how the archive becomes a storage place for *spectral memories*: for memories that have been silenced and forgotten, or simply overlooked, at least momentarily removed from the public domain, but have the potential of being brought back to public attention by means of contemporary art and literature. The archive is an important concept for both spectrality theory and for theories on cultural memory, and therefore relates these two fields explicitly. While cultural memory presents the public reading or representation of the past – the dominant narrative that can be accessed or is clearly visible – the archive provides a background to that public image. Although the archive is often regarded as a preservation tool supporting cultural memory, it can also store elements that are repressed and buried, but have the potential of returning to the public domain later. The archive thus offers a *spectral viewpoint* on cultural memory, and my purpose here is to explore exactly that viewpoint. While Aleida Assmann sees the archive as a form of storage memory and a second-order memory to the working memory, Derrida stresses the spectral nature of the archive, as being the place for absent memories that still have the potential of being retrieved and revisited in the future.⁷² Both emphasise the future potential of the archive that is inherent in its function as a preservation tool. However, the memory potential of the archive is not without complexities, since the documents of the archive can disclose as well as conceal the past. This stresses how memory objects need *context* in order to be meaningful and significant: some evidence or information that can tie the object in question, for example a photograph, to a specific time-space and a concrete setting. In this regard, the archived memories appear as spectres, as unknown figures that *return* with important messages from the past that are aimed at the future and destabilise any static representations of memory in the present.

The four case studies presented in the two chapters of this first part approach the archive from different perspectives. One looks at how the archive has been influenced by colonialism: as shaped by a political context based on unequal power relations and imperialist ideologies. Another considers the archive from the point of view of the photograph: a technology of memory that mediates and constitutes the archive. The third and final approach focuses on how the archive is shaped by domestic and familial needs. These different standpoints may seem random when grouped together in one introductory paragraph. Nonetheless, they testify to the diverse form and function the archive can take on in society and culture. Besides, the archive

⁷² Assmann, “Canon and Archive”; Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression”.

cannot be studied in isolation from its socio-political connotations, hence colonialism, nor can the impact of the invention of photography be left out of the account when considering the archive in a domestic setting. As I will discuss below, these two different influences lay the foundation for the modern form of the archive. The domestic and familial aspect stresses how common archives actually are, as boxes of personal letters or family albums are to be found in almost every household. While the colonial archive seems to be far away from the family album, the two demonstrate how the archive is considered a “storehouse” for memory, or a place/space where memory is passively stored, as well as having the potential of creating concrete links to the past for future generations. The first chapter examines what has been termed archival art, describing the works of artists who collect their material from institutional or scientific archives. Here the focus is on the collective domain of cultural memory, and on institutional archives that form the foundation for collective identities of different cultural groups, such as nations. The second chapter focuses on the function of the family archive in literature, more precisely how authors use the family archive to express their protagonists’ complex relationship to the past and to highlight the many complications of intergenerational memory within the family. Here the focus is on the private and personal memories of individuals and how family archives can impact the identity of the family as well as the self-identity of the individual family members. Projecting *spectral reading* on the case studies allows examining and questioning their double status of being *haunted* as well as *haunting*: what is haunting these images and texts and, more precisely, why do they haunt present-day viewers and readers? In all cases, the haunting represents a temporal anachronism, a time-is-out-of-jointedness, due to memories that have been repressed, but persist and seek to come to the fore at this very moment.

Chapter 1

Spectral Memories from the Institutional Archive

The first case study of the first chapter comprises two series of photographs titled *Musée Islandique* and *Das Experiment Island* by artist Ólöf Nordal (b. 1961). They were exhibited at the National Gallery in Reykjavík in 2012 and address the issue of the colonial archive in an Icelandic context. Both series present material from two different archives or counter-memories that disturb the prevailing notions of Icelandic cultural identity. The second case study of the chapter is the exhibition *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest* by artist Unnar Örn Auðarson (b. 1974) at the ASÍ gallery in Reykjavík in 2014, that addresses the photographic archive in an Icelandic context. The artist presents his findings of photographs from different institutional archives and places them in a different context and alongside different images of cultural memory. By this he explores the spectral potential of the archive, as the exhibition enables a new reading of the archived photographs and a new perspective on the memory they represent.

Art historian Hal Foster has written an influential text on the archive in the artistic context or what he terms the *archival impulse*: the desire to make “physically present” what has been lost or displaced, hidden or simply overlooked, such as documents of alternative knowledge or counter-memories: memories that are in opposition to the prevailing official narrative of the cultural memory.⁷³ However, what is perhaps the most important aspect of the archival impulse, as conceptualised by Foster, is the double-sidedness of the artworks: they not only draw their materials from archives but produce new archives as well, and as such they, as Foster illustrates: “[do] so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.”⁷⁴ Further, they arrange these materials according to a “quasi-archival logic” or what Foster describes with the deleuzian term “rhizome,” indicating the liberal structure of the organisation, growing like a strawberry plant, with no official beginning or ending, centre or margins. Foster’s definition is fitting when describing the exhibitions by Ólöf Nordal and Unnar Örn Auðarson. They do not only collect their material from different archives, but also create their own archive in the form of an exhibition.⁷⁵ Both place the archived documents, or photographic representations of the documents, in a new context, enabling a different kind of reading and interpretation from before, and giving the documents new meanings.

⁷³ Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse” *October*, Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004), 3-22.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁷⁵ According to Foster’s definition of archival art, artists do not only draw their material from archives but present their artistic practice in archival forms. *Ibid.*, 5.

Before analysing the case studies, I discuss how the archive has been conceptualised as the storage for “passive memory” within the field of memory studies, therefore functioning as a reference memory located in the background of the cultural memory. However, while the memory objects stored in the archive are considered to be in a passive state, the archive has been theorised as an important power tool in poststructuralist theory, that allows authorities control over the past or, more precisely, over how the past is read and represented. I will also outline how the archive undergoes a rigorous process of modernisation in the nineteenth century by following two defining moments of the period: that of photography and colonialism.⁷⁶ The colonial influence describes the historiography of the archive, stressing how it is immersed in certain ideologies. Photography, on the other hand, highlights the technological aspect of the archive, as well as the medial, emphasising how the archive contains memory objects that communicate or transmit the past in specific ways. The case studies of the chapter address these issues of colonialism and photography. The aim of the analysis is to focus on the mnemonic function of the artworks and how the artists *release* spectral memories from archives, and what light that sheds on the public image of cultural memory. The spectral aspect in this context emphasises how the archive can have a cultural-political function, or rather, a memory-political function: when it contains objects from the past which become politically relevant to the present. At the end of the chapter, I will conclude by comparing the works of these two different artists, and how they conjure up the spectre by drawing on forgotten, lost or hidden memories from the archive in order to destabilise static notions of cultural memory and identity. I argue that the two series portray types of cultural memories that demand to be read *spectrally*, that can demonstrate the role and function of the archive for cultural memory and forgetting.

The archive as storage for spectral memories

The archive is a fundamental concept when discussing the dynamics of remembering and forgetting that are constantly at work in the cultural memory. In “Canon and Archive” from 2008, Aleida Assmann divides memory into two categories, remembering and forgetting, while also illustrating how the two contain different sides: active and passive.⁷⁷ She defines *active forgetting* as an intentional form of forgetting that can be described with the destruction of objects and documents, or censoring, while *passive forgetting* is an unintentional act, when

⁷⁶ Ideas on the modernisation of the archive are drawn from Ernst van Alphen in *Staging the Archive* which is an important source for this study: *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2014).

⁷⁷ Assmann, “Canon and Archive”, 99.

something is lost, hidden for some reason, neglected, abandoned, left behind, or overlooked.⁷⁸ *Active remembering*, however, describes the active working memory, and is used to support collective identities and displayed in public realms. Assmann refers to this part of memory as the “canon”. *Passive remembering* is a sort of storage memory, that Assmann represents with the term “archive,” distinguishing it from the “canon” of memory. The objects of the canon are on display in the showrooms of museums, while the objects of the archive lie hidden in the storage rooms, in attics or cellars, forgotten by the general public and the museum’s visitors, but *preserved* in the cultural unconscious and not entirely lost. The active and passive sides of remembering have, therefore, different representational relations to the past: “the actively circulated memory that keeps the past as present as the canon and the passively stored memory that preserves the past past as the archive.”⁷⁹ While Assmann’s categorisation appears rigorous, the clear implication is that the distance between passive remembering and passive forgetting is not great, implying possible overlaps between the two categories. Despite the fact that the archive is usually meant to be a preservation tool that supports remembering, it can also become a place for passive forgetting, for example, when archives are displaced, neglected or ignored. The archive therefore becomes a storehouse for “detached” cultural relics that Assmann describes as objects that have lost their immediate reference, been decontextualised and disconnected from their former frames of meaning.⁸⁰ The stored memory appears as an amorphous mass of neutral objects that are not interrelated and have no relations to the present.⁸¹ Or as Assmann states:

On a collective level, the stored memory contains that which has become unusable, obsolete, or foreign; the neutral, identity-abstract factual knowledge; but also the repertoire of missed opportunities alternative options, and unused chances. The functional memory, in contrast, is an acquired memory, which emerges from a process of choosing, connecting, and constituting meaning. Unstructured, disconnected elements enter the functional memory composed, constructed, and connected. Meaning emerges from this constructive act, a quality which the stored memory fundamentally lacks.⁸²

⁷⁸ Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” 99.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸¹ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 35.

⁸² Assmann, *Erinnerungsraume: Formen un Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedachtnis* (Munich: Beck, 1999), 137. From: Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 35, trans. Sara B. Young.

The archived objects are therefore open to new contexts and interpretations, in other words, to new meanings. This aspect emphasises the great potential the archive can have for curious researchers: historians, writers and artists. It also approaches the central thesis in Derrida's conceptualisation of the archive: its promise and potential for the future. Even though the terminology, and words such as "passive" and "neutral," used by Assmann in the "Canon and Archive" article, suggest that the archive is not a political tool; its authoritative function is emphasised by poststructuralist scholars such as Foucault and Derrida, as well as later by Assmann.

In *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization* from 2011, Assmann discusses the political function of the archive which is already present in the word itself, its meaning and etymology, as it refers back to the Greek word "arké" that has a twofold meaning: "beginning" and "government".⁸³ She refers to Derrida's *Archive Fever*, where the philosopher starts off by describing the two semantic dimensions of the word and the relation between the two concepts the word conveys; on the one hand, "commencement" or beginning, and on the other, "commandment", or order.⁸⁴ In general, the poststructuralist approach to the archive, as seen in the texts by Foucault and Derrida, emphasises its function as a political tool of power. They criticise and challenge the neutrality of the elements stored in the archive and the neutrality of institutional collecting and preservation.⁸⁵ Or, as Derrida states: "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."⁸⁶ The archive is a storehouse for memory, and represents a power tool that allows authorities to determine how the past is read as well as how the present will be read in the future. As Assmann states: "a control of the archive means control of memory."⁸⁷ For Foucault, the archive is "a set of discursive rules" which determines what is allowed or possible to say in a socio-cultural context and what is not.⁸⁸ In his sense, the archive represents the *law* of what can be said and becomes a figurative tool for control and a carrier for all the knowledge existing in a society or a culture.⁸⁹

⁸³ Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 327.

⁸⁴ Derrida, "Archive Fever", 10-11.

⁸⁵ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 51.

⁸⁶ Derrida, "Archive Fever", 11.

⁸⁷ Assmann, "Archive and Canon", 328.

⁸⁸ See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁸⁹ van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 12.

While Assmann discusses how this metaphorical reading of the archive emphasizes its role as an “instrument of repression,” she stresses the limits of this reading, as it overlooks the biggest problem of the archive: the fact that the archive is not infinite, and as a storage space it is in fact very limited.⁹⁰ She refers to Boris Groys, who has criticised Foucault’s conceptualisation for being too immaterial, and suggests that one should, above all, think about the archive as something concrete and palpable: “and in this sense also threatened with destruction and thus finite, exclusive and restricted, so that one cannot find every possible statement pre-formulated in it.”⁹¹ The limits of the literal archive, as a space that stores objects of knowledge and memories, highlight the aspect of *exclusion*, and bring to the fore how objects must undergo a rigorous process of selection in order to acquire their place in the archive. This suggests how the archive gains its spectral aura by being haunted by the objects that are left out of it. In this sense, the archive is both haunted as well as a force that haunts: it is haunted by its own gaps and blind spots, as well as storing material that can haunt the public image of the cultural memory.

In the poststructuralist approach to the archive, an emphasis may be observed on *repression*. This is evident in Derrida’s as well as Jan Assmann’s conceptualisation of the archive: both relate its mechanism to the psychological process in the theories of Sigmund Freud. Astrid Erll stresses this repressive emphasis when she relates Derrida’s text on archival fever with the idea of the cultural crypt in Jan Assmann’s terms.⁹² The crypt stores the objects that have been excluded, not accepted or acknowledged, and even banned or censored. By referencing Freud, J. Assmann discusses how crypts are culturally constructed when certain fields or traditions of the culture are repressed and marginalised, described as subcultures or even criminalised.⁹³ Similarly, the crypt as conceptualised by Abraham and Torok in their articulation of “cryptonymy” stores repressed memories that subjects are either unable or not willing to process and work through.⁹⁴ The crypt becomes the storage place for trauma within the unconscious of the subject, and is symptomatic of “the illness of mourning”, which results in endless melancholia and depression, and is in opposition to the general conception of

⁹⁰ Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 331.

⁹¹ Boris Groys, *Über das Neue. Versch einer Kulturökonomie*, (Munich, 1992), 179. From: Assmann, *ibid.*, 331.

⁹² Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 51.

⁹³ Jan Assmann, “Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis” in *Erwagen, Wissen, Ethnik* 13:2, 239-47, 246. From Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 51. It seems that the texts where Assmann addresses the “crypt” have not been translated to English. This is therefore based on Astrid Erll’s discussion of the term.

⁹⁴ See Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Derrida writes the foreword.

mourning as a process with a definitive end point.⁹⁵ Jan Assmann distinguishes the archive from the crypt to emphasise the different forms of the cultural conscious: the crypt comes into being when memory objects are actively silenced or forgotten, while the archive contradictorily preserves memory objects that are nonetheless passively kept in the state of being forgotten.⁹⁶

On a similar note on the paradoxical “preserving-yet-forgetting” dynamics of the archive, Derrida speaks of *archival fever*, which he relates to a psychological drive, similar to Freud’s death drive. The archival fever is a contradictory drive or desire, to collect and remember, but at the same time to repress, erase and forget: “The death drive is not a principle. It even threatens every principality, every archontic primacy, every archival desire. It is what we will call, later on, *le mal d’archive*, ‘archive fever’.”⁹⁷ Derrida stresses how the psychological process of repression, i.e. of keeping something in the state of being forgotten, is inherent in the preservation act of the archive: “the contradiction between the act of memory or of archivization on the one hand and repression on the other remains irreducible. As if one could not, precisely, recall and archive the very thing one represses, archive it while repressing it (because repression is an archivization), that is to say, to archive otherwise, to repress the archive while archiving the repression.”⁹⁸ Simply stated, the archive seems to be an inherently ambiguous mechanism that memorialises and represses at the same time. This contradictory emphasis on repression and return gives the archive an uncanny dimension. The concept of the uncanny, originally “*unheimlich*” in German, put forward in Sigmund Freud’s famous essay from 1919, approaches memory from a melancholic viewpoint where something hidden has been brought to light, evoking a very particular kind of unfathomable terror. The uncanny presents the return of memories as a melancholic threat, as something that arouses gruesome feelings among the living. Repression is core to spectrality and hauntology, whether in the Freudian sense or as explained by Abrahams and Torok. While the idea of spectral memories is also grounded in the idea of return, spectrality presents a perspective on memory different from the uncanny, emphasising how the conceptualisation of the past, that takes place in the present, affects the future, and with the ethical emphasis on *welcoming* the return of the repressed.

⁹⁵ Abraham and Torok, “‘The Lost Object – Me’ : Notes on Endocryptic identification,” (1975) and Torok, “The Illness of Mourning and The Fantasy of The Exquisite Corpse.”

⁹⁶ J. Assmann, “Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis”, 246. From: Erll, 51.

⁹⁷ Derrida, “Archive Fever”, trans. Prenowitz, 12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

Derrida stresses how the archive is haunted by what is excluded from it, which points to the spectral nature of the archive, hence tying the text on the archive to his conceptualisation of “hauntology” in *Specters of Marx*, published a year before *Archive Fever*.⁹⁹ Hauntology seeks to analyse how spectralities, created by the presence of a spectre, suggest a temporal anachronism, implying that something that has been repressed, rematerialises. For Derrida, the archive has an inherently spectral structure: “Undoubtedly, but in the first place because the structure of the archive is spectral. It is spectral a priori: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh’, neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.”¹⁰⁰ The book *Archival Fever: A Freudian Impression* is based on a lecture Derrida gave in London in 1994, one year after the publication of *Spectres de Marx* in 1993. The two different works turn out to be close in content. *Archival Fever* reflects Derrida’s continuing emphasis on spectrality and fascination with the structure of the spectre as an appropriate configuration for matters that are simultaneously absent and present. He even draws on, and keeps referring to, the same metaphor as in *Specters of Marx*, that of prince Hamlet who is haunted by his father’s ghost, who returns from the dead with important patriarchal injunctions.¹⁰¹ In the earlier work, Derrida focuses on hauntology and the prevailing presence of Marx in academic discourse, as a way of asking scholarly discourse on historiography and memory to become more ethical. It is, however, the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, who takes the part of the patriarchal phantom in *Archival Fever*; the text focuses partly on Derrida’s reading of Freud’s work, as well as his critique on *Freud’s Moses*, a book by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, professor of Jewish history.¹⁰²

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida emphasises the future aspect of spectrality and therefore of the archive: “the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal, an archivable concept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.”¹⁰³ He further relates the future orientation with the subject of the messianic, which he had formerly discussed in *Specters of Marx*: “A spectral messianicity is at work in the concept of the archive and ties it, like religion, like history, like science itself, to a very singular experience of the

⁹⁹ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*.

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, “Archive Fever”, 84.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰² Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹⁰³ Derrida, “Archive Fever”, 36.

promise.”¹⁰⁴ He distinguishes the messianic from messianism by stating that future events that are yet to come can never be known beforehand, and in that very fact lies what Derrida terms as the “performative” potential of the future:

The condition on which the future remains to come is not only that it not be known, but that it not be knowable as such. Its determination should no longer come under the order of knowledge or of a horizon of preknowledge but rather a coming or an event which one allows or incites to come (without seeing anything come) in an experience which is heterogeneous to all taking note, as to any horizon of waiting as such: that is to say, to all stabilizable theorems as such. It is a question of this performative to come whose archive no longer has any relation to the record of what is, to the record of the presence of what is or will have been actually present. I call this the messianic, and I distinguish it radically from all messianism.¹⁰⁵

The idea of the spectral messianic is therefore a concept that is filled with hope towards the future to come, in the sense that the resurrection of the things hidden and repressed in the archive might be awaiting in store. *Archive Fever* therefore proposes an ambiguous attitude towards the archive, as Derrida seems to both conceptualise it as sort of pseudo-preservation tool that represses memories instead of memorialising them, and to emphasise its potential of preserving hidden memories for the future. This discussion illustrates how *politicised* the archive is, as a method, form and concept. Its politics seem to be integrated in its story: the development, and what Ernst van Alphen terms the “modernisation” of the archive during the nineteenth century, the time of positivist thinking underscoring scientific control and imperialism.¹⁰⁶

Modernisation of the archive: colonialism and photography

While archives have existed since the beginning of time, van Alphen defines the modern archive as a nineteenth-century phenomenon.¹⁰⁷ More precisely, he describes how the archive undergoes a rigorous process of rationalisation to meet the increased demand for scientific

¹⁰⁴ Derrida, “Archive Fever”, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁶ van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 22.

purposes and methods during the nineteenth century: a reformation consistent with the general drive to categorise everything in society, from flowers to humans, in the spirit of scientific development of the bourgeois society.¹⁰⁸ It reflects the predominant influence of enlightenment rationalism during the period, as the fundamental and comprehensive ideology.¹⁰⁹ One example testifying to this dominant scientific position is philosophical *positivism*, formulated by Auguste Comte, who believed that many factors of society could be explained with natural phenomena and logic.¹¹⁰ The rise of the photographic archive illustrates this drive to visualise scientifically all information found in society, to store, categorise and contextualise it. Van Alphen refers to the essay “The Body and the Archive” by Allan Sekula, who discusses the police archives in Paris from the period, created by Alphonse Bertillon, that stored information about physical tests and measurements of criminals in order to convey the physical attributes of the “criminal type.”¹¹¹ Another example noted by van Alphen is the photographic archive by the Englishman Francis Galton, who wanted to document the “hereditary qualities of race” showing the inferior traits of some races to others.¹¹² Van Alphen describes these nineteenth-century archives as “positivist attempts” at social control based on differentiation, where the archived document, here in the form of the classified photograph, becomes an image of scientific truth.¹¹³ This modernisation of the archive in the nineteenth century turns the archive into a central tool of *control* in various domains. It resulted in an *archival impulse* or the urgent need to store and contextualise information.¹¹⁴

Van Alphen mentions two important factors for the development of the archive during the positivist modernisation of the nineteenth century. One turns out to be medial, the invention of the medium of photography, and the other to be cultural-political, or the expansion of European colonialism.¹¹⁵ These two different aspects, one ideological and the other technological, come together in their need for *archival organisation*, and it is the archive that

¹⁰⁸ The Swedish physician Carl Linnaeus established a system where the main purpose was to classify every natural offspring – plants, animals as well as human beings – where he established links between appearance, race, skin colour and intellect. See for example “The Age of Linnaeus and the Enlightenment” in *The Epic History of Biology* by Anthony Serafini (Boston MA: Springer, 1993).

¹⁰⁹ Which influences the ideology of colonialism. See Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin: “Furthermore, it [colonialism] made use of the principles of natural law, which stipulated universal rights to trade, travel, explore and settle in foreign lands and justified violent actions if these rights were denied.” “Introduction: Situating Scandinavian Colonialism” in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of the Modernity: Small time agents in a global arena*, ed. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin, (New York: Springer, 2013), 3-16, 10.

¹¹⁰ van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 22.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹⁴ Here van Alphen cites Hal Foster’s term.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

combines photography and imperialism.¹¹⁶ The photographic archive stored the many photographs taken for scientific purposes, while the colonial archive kept information about the foreign and “exotic” colonised, collected and stored by the colonisers. As “military power” was not enough to guarantee rule over the colonial territory, it became important to collect knowledge and information about the unknown and exotic territory, as well as to store and order that information, resulting in vast colonial archives.¹¹⁷ Archives were regarded as storehouses of factual knowledge, which “was not waiting to be read or interpreted, but ordered.”¹¹⁸ These two elements, one medial and the other cultural-political, bring to the fore the different laws inherent in the archive: while the medial points to the literal sense of the archive, evoking the notion of the concrete photographic archive, the cultural-political aspect brings out the metaphorical sense, suggesting the ultimate aim of the archive of gaining total comprehensive knowledge in the Foucauldian sense. These two factors, photography and colonialism, are of central importance for the two case studies of this chapter. The photographs by Ólöf Nordal address the colonial archive in an Icelandic context, while the photographs by Unnar Örn Auðarson question the testimonial evidence and meaning production of photographic archives.

Musée Islandique and Das Experiment Island by Ólöf Nordal

Musée Islandique and *Das Experiment Island* are two series of photographs by artist Ólöf Nordal, exhibited at the National Gallery of Iceland in 2012.¹¹⁹ Both series make use of material from physical anthropological studies that were performed on Icelanders, and present them in the context of colonialism and ideas on racial difference. The first examination was conducted in 1856, by French scientists who made plaster casts of body parts of several Icelanders from different classes: the hands, legs, bust, chest and head of an Icelandic farmer, a fisherman, a labourer, an intellectual and two women. Today, the plaster casts are kept in the storage spaces of the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, but copies of the casts have also been found in El Museo Canario in the Canary Islands.¹²⁰ The second experiment is temporally closer, dating from 1972, but seems to be as forgotten by the Icelandic public as the former. The Icelandic, but German-

¹¹⁶ van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 21.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43. Van Alphen refers to Thomas Richards, author of *The Imperial Archives: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, who describes how this collecting of facts was aimed at gaining “comprehensive knowledge”, i.e. knowledge that was believed to be singular, complete and global, not plural, partial or local, (London: Verso, 1993), 7.

¹¹⁹ Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique* and *Das Experiment Island*.

¹²⁰ That is where artist Ólöf discovers them; or in fact a cousin of hers, who tells her about his find during a family reunion. Discussion during *Hugarflug*, series of seminars organized by LHÍ the Art Academy in Iceland in March 2015.

based, anthropologist Dr. Jens Pálsson and his research team measured the head shapes of Icelanders and took biological samples of them, such as locks of hair. Pálsson collected a tremendous amount of samples but his experiments never yielded any results. This massive store of samples is kept in the storage spaces of the University of Iceland, and the artist has described how difficult it was to gain access and be allowed to photograph them.¹²¹ These two series of photographs are clear examples of counter-memories that are passively stored in the archive, and later invited to be on display in a canonical institution in the form of contemporary art. The title “Musée Islandique” is taken from the exhibition of the plaster casts in Paris in 1856, while the title “Das Experiment Island” was created by the artist herself to describe the extensive archive generated by Pálsson. The aim of the following analysis is to look at the *mnemonic function* of the artwork, precisely how the series present archived material that functions as *spectral memories*: memories that have been forgotten, perhaps silenced and repressed, but live on in spectral forms in displaced archives. The artist and her artistic practice allows these memories to return to the public realm, where their haunting quality is enabled to disturb dominant narratives on cultural memory and national identity.

Musée Islandique

The *Musée Islandique* series consists of twenty-two colour photographs which portray different parts of plaster casts made of the bodies of several Icelanders. The series presents three different types of photographs. The first portrays the plaster cast busts of each subject, with the other busts in the background, where one can see items such as shelves, boxes and filing cabinets that situate the objects in a storage room (image 1.1 and 1.2). The heads are all light-grey in colour with dark-grey spots on them, except one bust that has been completed in full and painted in a fair skin tone.

¹²¹ During the *Hugarflug* seminar, the artist herself presented her work, and art historian Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir and anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir gave talks. Both have written articles on the work. Art historian Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir approaches the work from diverse art historical viewpoints, such as photography and archival art. She emphasizes the definition of the work as belonging to the category of “contemporary art”, which focuses on discursive contexts and epistemologies, rather than being bound to aesthetic objectives. This draws attention to the potential role of the artist in researching memory and questioning constructions of identity. Anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir has written on the work in light of colonialism and racism, where she relates the experiments to colonial exhibitions and the infamous world fairs of the nineteenth century. These two viewpoints are highly relevant when discussing the work, and I will refer to both authors in my analysis. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, “The Attraction of Physical Anthropology in Ólöf Nordal’s *Musée Islandique*” in *Musée Islandique: Ólöf Nordal*, exhibition catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition at the National Gallery in Iceland, in 2012. Trans. Anna Yates, 5-16 and Kristín Loftsdóttir, “Hlutgerving og kynþáttaflokkarnir á Íslandssafninu í París: Hugleiðingar út frá myndum Ólafar Nordal” in *Skírnir: 189* (2015), 424 – 443.



Image 1.1 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Buste en plâtre de Skafti Skartason, né à Reykiavik le 2 juillet 1805, mécanicien. Islandais. (Plaster bust of Skafti Skartason, born in Reykjavik, July 2 1805, mechanic. Icelandic).
Photo 90 × 90 cm. 2010.



Image 1.2 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Buste en plâtre de Bjarni Johnson, Islandais, moulé sur le vivant par M. Stahl, peint par M. Froment. (Plaster bust of Bjarni Jónsson, an Icelandic, cast by Mr. Stahl from life, painted by Mr. Froment.). Photo 90 × 90 cm. 2010.

During the exhibition at the National Gallery in Iceland, the photographs were mounted in a single row on the walls of the exhibition space, highlighting the reiteration inherent in the form of the archive, as well as suggesting a common way of exhibiting “normal” portraits, i.e. of living human subjects. The second type of photographs portray the hands of the subjects that have been completed and painted in a fair skin colour (image 1.3), making them somehow hyper-real, evoking an uncanny correlation with lifeless bodies that may return to life at any moment. The hands lie on what seems to be the green surface of a table and one can detect a small inscription of a number and the word “islandais” (Icelandic), which points to the archival cataloguing.



Image 1.3 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. La main gauche de Sigríður Bjarnadóttir et Þorci Arnardóttir, serviteurs islandais. (The left hand of Sigríður Bjarnadóttir and Þorunn Árnadóttir, Icelandic maidservants). Photo 77 × 60 cm. 2010.

The third type of photographs shows the assemblage of different body parts: for the men that means the torso with a leg and arm (image 1.4), and for the women, the leg, arm, navel and breasts (image 1.5). The artist's choice of positioning the fragmented body parts together highlights the dehumanising effect when the archive purports to represent living human beings, but only contains lifeless casts of parts of their bodies. The *Musée Islandique* series portrays the objectification inherent within the form of the archive: where flesh and blood is transformed into lifeless materials.



Image 1.4 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Partie antérieure du torse, moulage du membre supérieur gauche, moulage du membre inférieur gauche de Kristján Gíslason, 23 ans, né à Reyjavík, pêcheur islandais (Front of torso, cast of left arm, cast of left leg of Kristján Gíslason, aged 23, born in Reykjavík. Icelandic fisherman.) Photo 115 x 90 cm. 2010.



Image 1.5 Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*. Partie antérieure du torse, moulage du membre supérieur gauche, moulage du membre inférieur gauche de Fridrika Gudmundsdottir, née à Reykjavik le 28 janvier 1819. Islandaise. (Front of torso, cast of left arm, cast of left leg of Friðrika Guðmundsdóttir, born in Reykjavik, January 28 1819. Icelandic). Photo 70 × 90 cm. 2010.

All three types of photographs document the transformation of living subjects into objects. This objectification of the archive is *uncanny* because it presents a process where living beings lose their identity and sense of self by becoming life-less objects. These are familiar bodies that have become unfamiliar due to the workings of the archive. The fragmented body as such brings to mind uncanny associations suggesting the image of a dismembered corpse. These photographs are *spectral* in the sense of evoking the material presence of people from the past, who have died. They become haunting to viewers by raising questions which are left unanswered within the photographic image: such as on the origins and objectives of the archive, the purpose of the experiments, as well as the identity of the human subjects posing, as dehumanised subjects, in the portraits.

The colonial archive and historical context

The story behind the *Musée Islandique* archive is told in the exhibition catalogue. It describes how the French prince Jérôme Napoléon arrived in Reykjavík in June 1856 and later that summer sailed to the West Fjords, in order to explore potential colonial territories for the French empire as well as possible areas for building operational units for fish-processing.¹²² The expedition was therefore a part of the colonial expansion of France during the imperialist era of the nineteenth century, when European empires competed in conquests and sought to strengthen their connections in foreign territories.¹²³ The creation of plaster casts was a typical method when creating a colonial archive; art historian Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir discusses how casts of this sort, during the nineteenth century, were considered typical documents or research objects, such as photographs, and above all images that were supposed to give insight into the remote and mysterious, the unknown and exotic.¹²⁴ The exhibition of the plaster casts in the Palais-Royal the same year was a very typical colonial exhibition for the period; as Kristín Loftsdóttir states, the exhibitions of foreign objects and human beings from colonial territories were supposed to highlight the superiority of the French, their central position in the world and their custodial role in civilising the rest of the world.¹²⁵

The individuals that were chosen for the plaster casts were thought of as being representatives for the Icelandic nation, or rather, the Icelandic *race*. Sigurjónsdóttir states that little is known about how these individuals were chosen, but that artist Ólöf Nordal has traced their names and how they were meant to be representative for every class of society.¹²⁶ In this context the archival objects are supposed to be representative of a whole nation. The series thus presents material from two different *colonial archives*, or at least archives that have strong connotations, albeit strange and complex relations, to that form of the archive, due to the peculiar status of Iceland in a colonial context. Iceland had originally become a part of Norway in 1262, but was taken under the rule of the Danish king during the late fourteenth century, to regain its independence only in the twentieth century, with the foundation of the modern republic in 1944. While Iceland is often referred to as having been a “hjálanda” (dependency)

¹²² Sigurjónsdóttir, “The Attraction”, 6.

¹²³ Loftsdóttir, “Hlutgerving”, 430-1. Here she refers to historian Kjartan Ólafsson who has written on the French explorations in Iceland: “Áform Frakka um nýlendu við Dýrafjörð: Napóleón Prins á Íslandi 1856,” *Saga tímarit Sögufélags*, (24/1986), 147 – 203.

¹²⁴ Sigurjónsdóttir, “The Attraction”, 7.

¹²⁵ Loftsdóttir, “Hlutgerving”, 431. With reference to Wolfram Kaiser, “Vive La France! Vive La République? The Cultural Construction of French Identity at the World Exhibitions in Paris 1855-1900” in *National Identities* 1, no. 3 (1999), 227-44, 231.

¹²⁶ Sigurjónsdóttir, “The Attraction”, 8.

in contemporary discussion, which tends to avoid the term “colony,” its relations to Denmark can to a certain extent be described in light of colonial and post-colonial theories, since control over the country and the nation was part of the expansion of the Danish imperialist state during the colonialist era. Historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson explains, however, that it is not historically accurate to label Iceland as a Danish colony in the nineteenth-century meaning of the term, simply because relations between Denmark and Iceland at that time were very different from the relations between the European colonisers and the countries colonised in the global south.¹²⁷ However, he also describes how colonialism was not only a political and military strategy, but also a “system of cultural power based on accepted norm of knowledge” and where the world was divided into “civilised” and “uncultivated parts,” “us” and “them,” “Europe” and “the other.”¹²⁸ Or as he states: “in the colonial dichotomy, Iceland was therefore classified as a colony.”¹²⁹ In light of colonialism and cultural hierarchies, Iceland was at this time regarded as a part of the *far-away and unknown exotic other*, as many travel writings from the period show, as well as the documents portrayed by Ólöf Nordal in her series.¹³⁰ Hálfðanarson discusses two travel narratives of these sorts, and historian Sumarliði Ísleifsson has explained how these travel narratives establish a certain image construction of Iceland, which he traces from the middle ages to the late nineteenth century, and draws a comparison with the image of Greenland, another Danish colony.¹³¹ Gavin Lucas and Angelos Parigoris discuss how the term *crypto-colony* or *crypto-colonialism* might be appropriate to describe the Icelandic situation: “Crypto-colonialism refers to the effect of colonialism on those regions or countries which were never directly annexed through the colonial project, and thus being neither coloniser nor colonised, fall between the cracks of western discourse.”¹³²

¹²⁷ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “Var Ísland nýlenda?” *Saga*: 52 no.1 2014 , 42-75, 70.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³⁰ Here I am referring to the casts that shed an exotic light on the Icelandic subjects they portray. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir has discussed the travel documents from the prince’s expedition, such as travel diaries where the authors describe one of the subjects as “a good specimen of the Nordic race” since he is gigantic and prone to drunkenness. See “The Attraction” 8.

¹³¹ Sumarliði Ísleifsson, *Tvær eyjar á jaðrinum: úmyndir Íslands og Grænlands frá miðöldum til miðrar 19. aldar* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2015).

¹³² “Herzfeld’s arguments which focus mainly on Greece apply equally well to Iceland insofar as they display a doubled absence in contemporary discourse. On the one hand, Iceland is conspicuously marginal in broader discussions of European history and archaeology; on the other hand, even when it does receive attention – as in the case of Viking Age – this masks a more furtive absence insofar as the actual contribution of Iceland to European historiography remains rather invisible. Iceland barely registers in histories of archaeology compared to other nations.”, 91. They discuss the debates on whether Iceland was a colony or not, and the term “dependency”, 92. Gavin Lucas and Angelos Parigoris “Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism” in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of the Modernity*, 89-104.

Avoiding the term “colony” in Icelandic discourse partially reflects a collective shame among Icelanders for being classified as secondary citizens of the world, implied by the word “colonised” and according to the racial classification of the nineteenth-century imperialism: the *cultural* colonial dichotomy Hálfðanarson speaks of. And here is where the question of race and racial difference becomes important but also complicated. Kristín Loftsdóttir and Gísli Pálsson discuss this complication of race and colonialism in their chapter “Black on White: Danish Colonialism, Iceland and the Caribbean,” in *Scandinavian Colonialism and The Rise of Modernity* from 2013.¹³³ They describe how the idea of racial difference (and hierarchy) is seen by most scholars today as emerging in connection to the nation state and ideas of modernity, reaching its peak with colonialism during the imperialist era.¹³⁴ They also discuss how Iceland as a colony during the imperialist era remained in a contradictory position. Icelanders were in some sense seen as a people who needed to be colonised, to be brought to modernity in terms of being informed and civilised, and Iceland was a place of curiosity and mystique like other unknown “exotic” colonial territories.¹³⁵ But as such, it was also seen as the home base of everything authentically Nordic, due to the isolation of the island. Iceland was seen as an important source for Germanic culture and therefore it held a strong attraction for nationalists, who would for example draw links between the inhabitants and the greatness of the Nordic heroes and the Vikings of the sagas.¹³⁶ In the same book, Lucas and Parigoris discuss how Icelanders are different Danish colonial subjects from the inhabitants of Greenland and the West Indies, due their role as “guardians of common heritage”: “Icelanders based their demands for national emancipation on the claim that they spoke the original language of the Nordic people. [...] It is argued therefore that Iceland did not share the same position as the other Danish colonies which held no representative positions and were often subjected to civilising missions. On the contrary both the Danes and Icelanders subscribed to a common mythology for achieving their own separate national inspirations.”¹³⁷ Thus, even though Iceland was seen as part of the faraway colonised territory and, as Hálfðanarson states, was classified culturally as a colony, Icelanders, on the contrary, sought to side with the colonisers from a cultural and historical point of view.

¹³³ Kristín Loftsdóttir and Gísli Pálsson, “Black on White: Danish Colonialism, Iceland and the Caribbean” in *Scandinavian Colonialism*, 37-52.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³⁷ Gavin Lucas and Angelos Parigoris, “Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism” in *Scandinavian Colonialism*, 89-104, 92.

The position of Iceland during the colonialist period is reflected, according to Kristín Loftsdóttir, in the Danish colonial exhibitions, or rather in the harsh reaction of Icelandic students to Icelandic people being on display on these exhibitions.¹³⁸ Colonial exhibitions were common in the colonial empires, and took place, for example, during the infamous world fairs, first with the “Great Exhibition” in Britain in 1851. The aim of the fairs was above all to show the superiority of each nation, by exhibiting recent discoveries of the industrial revolution as well as presenting the knowledge collected about the exotic world outside Europe, in other words the colonial territories.¹³⁹ The Eiffel Tower, which is doubtless one of the most famous monuments in the world, is for example a product of the World Fair in Paris in 1889, which also included a “negro-village” that displayed four hundred inhabitants from different colonies.¹⁴⁰ Colonial exhibitions with human beings on display also took place in the Nordic countries, for example in the Tivoli in Copenhagen, Denmark. In 1905, Danish authorities were planning a colonial exhibition with subjects from their colonies in the Caribbean, as well as from Greenland and Iceland. Icelandic students living in Copenhagen were furious at the idea and protested loudly by stating: “We consider it a disgrace, if Icelandic women are to be displayed with daughters of Eskimos and black women.”¹⁴¹ Loftsdóttir has written about these reactions of the Icelandic students and states that they project the peculiar position of Icelanders in European thought. While fearing humiliation, they sought the approval or recognition of the outside world and above all desired independence and freedom from Danish rule.¹⁴²

Icelanders sided with the colonisers and believed in racial difference, as the quotation above from the Icelandic student shows, making it more difficult for them to come to terms with being culturally classified as a colony during the imperialist era. When discussing Icelanders as colonial subjects, it is nevertheless important to note and highlight that while they were certainly under foreign rule, they did not experience the same violence and cruelty as the colonised nations: “While Iceland remained in an ambivalent position identifying itself with imperial Europe and being treated as a colonial subject, other areas, especially Greenland, were subjected to the full-blown policies of economic exploitation and civilizing quests.”¹⁴³ The

¹³⁸ Loftsdóttir, “Hlutgerving”, 424.

¹³⁹ Loftsdóttir, “Örheimur ímyndunarlandsins: Framandleiki og vald í ljósi heimssýninganna” in *TMM* 63, 4/2002, 52-61, 54.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁴¹ “Það þikur oss vanvirða, ef setja á íslenskar konur á pall með Eskimóadætrum og blökkumannakonum.” In „Hjálendu“ síningin danska” in *Ingólfur*, 18. desember 1904, 205-6. From Loftsdóttir, “Hlutgerving”, 424.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 424.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 424. Lucas and Parigoris also describe how Icelanders seek to side with the colonisers: “At the same time, Icelandic elites and intellectuals tried to distance themselves from this image through participating in the same colonial discourse of non-western peoples.” “Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism”, 97-8.

status of Iceland in the context of colonialism suggests different power relations between the Scandinavian countries, and points towards a cultural hierarchy that is to be found within those relations.¹⁴⁴ It is generally believed that the Scandinavian countries played only a small part in colonialism.¹⁴⁵ However, with the rise of post-colonial discourse, that illusion is slowly but progressively being worked through. Denmark was an imperialist state during the period, with colonies not only in the North Atlantic but also in the global south of the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. The aforementioned *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity* is a good example of the recent emphasis on looking critically at the part of the Nordic countries in colonising the world. The editors, M. Naum and J.M. Nordin, state in the introduction:

In recent years the involvement of the early modern Scandinavian countries in colonial ventures has been under increasing scrutiny of historians, anthropologists and archaeologists. New projects, academic centres and a growing number of publications start to question and dissect the nature of Scandinavian participation in colonial expansion, adaptation and contribution to a Eurocentric worldview and production of racial ideologies.¹⁴⁶

They elaborate on how the perspective on the involvement of the Scandinavian countries in colonialism is decidedly ambivalent. While emphasising their part in colonial history as a historical testimony for their participation in world politics, the most widespread view among academics, politicians and the general public is that that the interactions between Scandinavia and the colonies in Africa, Asia and Caribbean, were “gentler and based on collaboration” than in the case of the English, Spanish and Dutch colonisers.¹⁴⁷ However, Naum and Nordin expose

¹⁴⁴ Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen, “Introduction: Nordic Exceptionalism and the Nordic ‘Others’” in *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region, Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 1-12, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Lucas and Parigoris write: “it is worth noting that the denial to consider nineteenth century Denmark as an empire despite the possession of numerous colonies clearly illustrates an unwillingness to equate Denmark with those empires that have been associated with oppression and exploitation of their colonies. However reductionist this form of thinking might be, it clearly manifests the attempt of Scandinavian states to disassociate themselves from the colonial legacies of oppression and racism and be linked to a national mythology that speaks of welfare states, rationality and modernity.” “Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism”, 93. Helle Jørgensen states that this might be because Denmark sold its colonies relatively early and long before the general decolonisation period of the twentieth century, “Heritage Tourism in Tranquebar: Colonial Nostalgia or Postcolonial Encounter?” in *Scandinavian Colonialism*, 69-86, 75.

¹⁴⁶ Naum and Nordin, “Introduction” in *Scandinavian Colonialism*, 3-16, 3-4.

¹⁴⁷ Naum and Nordin, “Introduction” in *Scandinavian Colonialism*, 4 and 10. See further: “This whitewashed and keenly reproduced picture of minimal or non-involvement in colonial expansion is, partly also, a result of adopting a narrow definition of colonialism, which reduces it to the possession of colonies in the far corners of the world [...] The wide range of case studies presented in this volume is an invitation to rethink the definition of colonialism

how, like other imperialist nations, Scandinavian colonisers justified their colonial quests with ideas on racial difference and hierarchy:

It is true that the Crown and some of the administrators opted for peaceful coexistence in the colonies and trading posts and sometimes questioned the correctness of racial categories undermining intelligence and skills of native population and African slaves. More often than not, however, this attitude was motivated by the intricate and fragile position on the competitive colonial stage and strategically applied when resources to support and sustain the ventures were limited. Correspondences sent from the colonies as well as travel narratives indicate, that cruelty and strongly pejorative attitudes towards the non-Europeans and non-Christians were a common occurrence in the Swedish and Danish colonies, making them no less oppressive and intolerant as other colonial ventures.¹⁴⁸

This ambivalence suggests a lack of critical research on Scandinavian colonial history, which shows how urgent it is to deal with this communal colonial past. Loftsdóttir advocates, for example, *conjuring up the colonial spectres and ghosts of the past*, implying how the imperial past of Scandinavia haunts the present by not being dealt with critically and theoretically.¹⁴⁹ Audrey Horning puts it in no uncertain terms when she writes: “So why does colonialism matter, and why in particular does Scandinavian colonialism matter? Simply put, because its legacies remain unresolved.”¹⁵⁰ I would further add that the colonial secrets and myths of the past impact contemporary debates on identity and belonging, stressing the power-play at stake in memory constructions, and the archive as an authoritative tool. The *Musée Islandique* series

to include such a broad understanding of this process, one that considers economic strategies and appetites for exotic commodities, political and cultural aspirations and ideologies as a part of colonial politics and imperial mindsets.”, 4-5.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁹ Loftsdóttir, “Hlutgerving”, 425.

¹⁵⁰ Audrey Horning, “Insinuations: Framing a New Understanding of Colonialism”, in *Scandinavian Colonialism*, 297-306, 298. Later in her article Horning writes: “Challenging simplistic versions of Sweden as a ‘benevolent presence in the colonial European world,’ Fur argues for a more reflexive understanding of the contemporary debates over identity and immigration within Sweden.” Similarly, Lucas and Parigoris argue that “efforts to deny nineteenth-century Denmark imperial status serve only to obscure Danish complicity in the racism and oppression attendant upon imperial projects. History, here, has a strong social value. Without greater honesty over the character of Scandinavia’s past immersion in colonial politics and practices, contemporary debates will remain impoverished.”, 304.

thus becomes highly spectral and haunting, as it allows for the conjuring up of the colonial spectres and ghosts of both the Icelandic past and the communal Scandinavian past.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Gayatri Spivak states that the colonial archives did not store the *facts* of the colonised territory, but rather representative objects constructed by the colonisers, later imposed as being the reality of, for example, India.¹⁵¹ This can be related to what Edward Said termed *orientalism*, and describes how Western colonisers constructed an image of the Orient in opposition to what they thought of themselves.¹⁵² Colonial archives should therefore not be read as being accurate historical documents of the past, but rather as being representations of the imagined imperial past and the colonial fantasy. As van Alphen states, the well-constructed archive becomes a symbol of power: “The ideal of a well-ordered, unified system of knowledge is at the same time an image of a well-ordered and unified empire.”¹⁵³ The archive gives the illusion of having control over the empire in its totality; also the unknown and foreign colonial territories that Westerners viewed as “exotic” territory. The two colonial archives presented in the two series by Nordal aim at collecting, storing and ordering information about the origin of the Icelandic people. This is evident in the example of the *Musée Islandique* project, performed at the height of the colonialist era, where the life-less body parts represent the gaze of the coloniser, rather than being accurate documents of how the Icelandic nation looked at a certain moment in time. It adds to the uncanny/spectral effect of the series and raises questions on reception: how do these spectral limbs from the past impact present-day viewers and their ideas on the collective past? Especially Icelandic viewers who are not used to considering their communal colonial past or their status as formerly-colonised subjects? In the case of the second series, *Das Experiment Island*, the idea of a colonial archive is particularly strange, considering that the experiments took place in the 1970s when many of the colonies had become post-colonies, including Iceland, and when the colonialist era starts to be critically discussed in academia with the birth of post-colonial discourse.

Das Experiment Island

While the anthropometric work of the *Musée Islandique* series indicates the beginning of physical anthropology, experiments that emerged in the nineteenth century, the *Das Experiment*

¹⁵¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 203. From: van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 43.

¹⁵² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

¹⁵³ van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 43.

Island series marks the end of such work.¹⁵⁴ More than a century separates these two archives, a time that witnessed two world wars and atrocities based on ideologies and experiments on racial difference. Pálsson's archive of specimens is many times larger and more complex than the archive of plaster casts made by the French scientists, as it comprises tens of thousands of biological specimens and photographs, as well as anthropometric data.¹⁵⁵ While the *Musée Islandique* series presents viewers with photographs of replicas, the *Das Experiment Island* photographs portray small parts of human subjects that are above all originals, genuine and real. As Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir explains, Pálsson's status during the time of the experiments was prestigious: he was a professor at the University of Iceland, a founder of the University of Iceland Institute of Anthropology, and the first Icelander to earn a doctorate in physical anthropology.¹⁵⁶ Pálsson was therefore a seminal figure in the establishment of anthropology in Iceland, who studied anthropology in Berkeley, Uppsala and in Mainz, Germany, where he received his doctorate.¹⁵⁷ The aim of Dr. Pálsson's experiments was to measure the regional variations in the physical attributes of Icelanders, with comparison to neighbouring nations, such as Greenlanders, Norwegians, and inhabitants of Alaska and Canada.¹⁵⁸ In addition to the measurements, Pálsson took photographs, collected hair samples, and recorded details of fingerprints and eyes. Despite the enormous amount of fieldwork performed by Pálsson, as well as his prestigious status and successful career, his legacy is described as poor: "Despite effective promotional activity, extensive collection of data over a period of decades, a group of colleagues and considerable financial backing from both Iceland and Germany, the legacy of Pálsson's work is not great."¹⁵⁹ This is due to the fact that he never published any results of his experiments where the cataloguing and classification of specimen is supported by theoretical discussion.¹⁶⁰ The idea of lifeless memories comes to mind and a melancholic reading frames Pálsson's archive as a morgue that not only bears witness to the life of the archived subjects, but also becomes a testimony to a redundant ideology and a obsolete method, since the experiments mark the end of physical anthropology, when the methods of phrenology were in their closing stages. In this sense, the archive becomes a memorial in a double sense: to the

¹⁵⁴ Sigurjónsdóttir, "The Attraction", 7.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Gísli Pálsson and Sigurður Örn Guðbjörnsson, "*Musée Islandique: an encounter between physical anthropology and art*", trans. Anna Yates, in *Musée Islandique: Ólöf Nordal* (exhibition catalogue), 41-53, 49.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

deceased archived subjects as well as to the ideology and method that in the scientific context of academia have become outdated.

The *Das Experiment Island* series consists of ten colour photographs that illustrate how the artist has worked through the mass of archived material. Here the agency of the artist in mediating the archived documents becomes important, and Nordal's choice and decisions when positioning and photographing the sensitive specimens, in order to bring out their *haunting* qualities. In other words, to portray them in a way that encourages viewers to ask questions about the origins of the specimens and the reasons for the experiments to begin with. One of her emphases is to mediate the *mass* stored in the archive by capturing piles of material, such as photographs, but also locks of hair and documentation of fingerprints, and handwritten notes. The abundance of material suggest randomness, which is in contradiction to the general rigorousness of the institutional archive, its classification and ordering. Rather, the photographs are reminiscent of the unsystematic family archive: boxes in attics that store piles of old photographs and small pieces of paper with handwritten notes on them.



Image 1.6 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island II*. Photo 90 × 135 cm. 2012.



Image 1.7 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island IV*. Photo 90 × 135 cm. 2012.

The photographs expressing this random mass also show how the artist assembles the archived material in an aesthetic order highlighting how scientific data is turned into objects of art as well as stressing the aestheticisation inherent in the photography medium. This is evident in a photograph where locks of dark red hair, fastened to pieces of papers with handwritten inscriptions, usually a name and a number (image 1.8), have been assembled for the photograph. The aesthetic ordering gives the viewer a better chance of reading into the archive and of understanding its laws, how the material is preserved and ordered, while also making the material visually pleasing and attracting the viewer to it.



Image 1.8 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island V*. Photo 90 × 135 cm. 2012.

A different type of photographs portrays single locks of hair in close-up (image 1.9) As in the case of the *Musée Islandique* archive, the objectification effect of the *Das Experiment Island* archive is emphasised. Here the focus is on the “realness” of the archived object and its relation to a real person that once existed, in terms of Roland Barthes the “ça-a-été of the photograph,” which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, as viewers can see the name of the owner of the hair lock stated on the piece of paper, creating a stronger link to the real human subject than in the case of *Musée Islandique*.



Image 1.9 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island VIII*. Photo 35 × 50 cm. 2012.

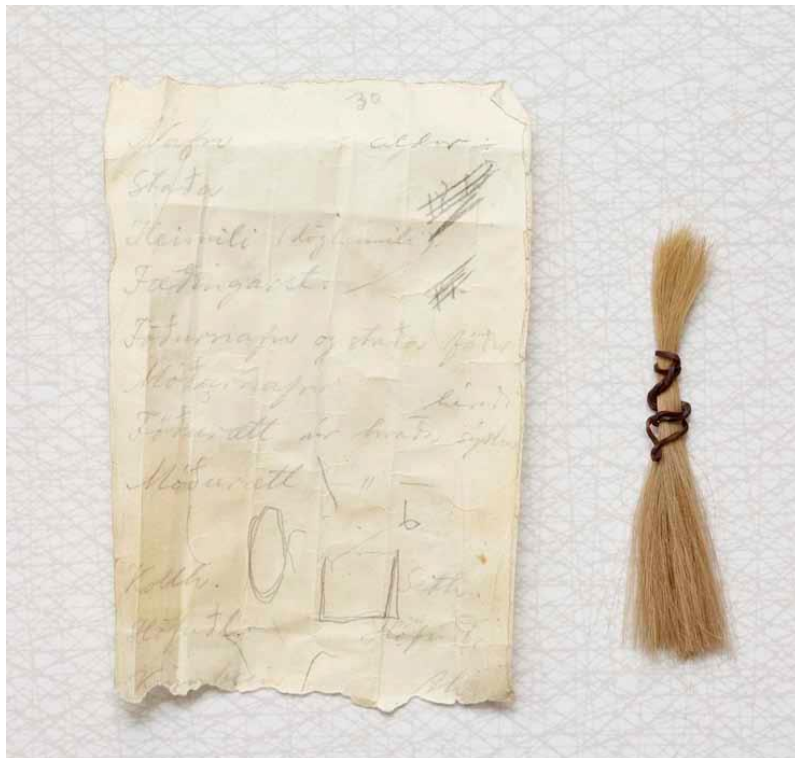


Image 1.10 Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island X*. Photo 35 × 50 cm. 2012.

The last photograph (image 1.10) catches the eye, in particular the piece of paper that has been placed next to the fair-coloured lock of hair. The paper itself seems worn, yellowish, with indistinct stains, and has been folded more than once. The handwriting is unclear, blurry and in some cases something seems to have been scribbled but then scratched out. This note, like many others from the photos, is reminiscent of a page from a personal notebook that one might accidentally stumble upon in a drawer in an old desk, not an official document from a scientific archive kept in the storage space of the University of Iceland. This random, somewhat personal touch of the *Das Experiment Island* archive undermines its scientific value and encourages a new type of reading of the archived material. A video, showing an old clip from Icelandic TV news, was also on display in the exhibition space next to the photographs. The clip presented Pálsson's experiments, showing how he and his team measured the different features of people, for example head and face. The clip, dating from 1972, indicates that some of the research subjects may still be alive. This last point stresses how the *Das Experiment Island* series evokes a stronger feeling of the uncanny than in the case of *Musée Islandique*, since it is obvious that the archived object is a real object. In contrast to the former archive, which stores replicas of human body parts, Pálsson's archive stores real hair, from a real person who might still be alive. However, before addressing why *Das Experiment Island* is more uncanny and haunting, or at least problematic, than the *Musée Islandique*, I will discuss how the form of the archive, and archival principles, have been conceptualised as being inherently uncanny and threatening due to their relationship to fascist ideologies. This uncanny dimension of the archive derives from its dehumanising and objectifying effect, and emphasises it as a repressive force, all of which are taken to the extreme in fascist methods, for example by the Nazis in the Holocaust.

The uncanny associations of the archive

Academics have discussed the strong connotations archival principles have of fascism, and to the methods of the Nazis in the Holocaust.¹⁶¹ Hitler built his concentration camps, especially Auschwitz, on archival principles, and van Alphen describes how Alain Resnais' documentary, *Nuit et brouillard*, that premiered in 1955, presents the camps as partly being "monstrous

¹⁶¹ Van Alphen discusses this in *Staging the Archive*, 208. He refers to Gene Ray's book *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory* (New York, 2005), where Ray discusses how *Night and Fog* visualises the concentration camps as monstrous archives, as well as to Eric Ketelaar's article, "Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection" in *Archival Science*, II (2002), 221 – 38. Ketelaar discusses the function of archival principles for Nazism. Artist Christian Bolthanski addresses the Holocaust in his art practice that can be described as archival art. Bolthanski often re-enacts the form of the archive to depict Holocaust imagery, see for instance *Chases High School* (1988), *The Dead Swiss* (1991), *Monument: The Children of Dijon* (1986).

archives and storage.”¹⁶² The documentary had a huge impact on its Western audience and was followed by a general interest in the archive among artists and others.¹⁶³ The documentary shows scenes from the camps after their liberation and contains footage of huge piles of objects such as clothing, shoes, combs and glasses, of human items like hair, as well as of dead bodies (images 1.11 and 1.12). In Marianne Hirsch’s terms, these images have become *iconic* as “emblematic public images used in Holocaust representation and memorialisation, images repeated in textbooks and museums.”¹⁶⁴ As such, these images influence how people visualise the atrocious events: “these images have come to function more specifically as tropes for Holocaust memory itself.”¹⁶⁵ Axel Stähler terms the images as “recognizable icons of the Holocaust across the world” and discusses the impact the documentary had on the construction of the collective memory of the events.¹⁶⁶ The photographs portraying locks of hair, from the *Das Experiment Island* series, suggest strong visual correlation with the imagery of the “monstrous archives” depicted in *Nuit et brouillard*. This suggests how memory can become *transcultural* and how haunted and spectral memories do not respect national borders.



Image 1.11 Alain Resnais, *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955), still (shoes).

¹⁶² van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 192. Axel Stähler describes them as “archives of atrocity” in his article: “Fighting the Fever: Archives of Atrocity in Alain Resnais’ *Nuit et brouillard*” and David Grossman’s *See Under: Love*” in *Comparative Critical Studies: The Journal of the British Comparative Literature Association*, Vol. 8.2-3 (2011), 207-220.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁶⁴ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 113.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁶⁶ Stähler, “Fighting the Fever: Archives of Atrocity”, 208.



Image 1.12 Alain Resnais, *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955), still (shaven hair)¹⁶⁷

Archival principles are not only at stake in the Holocaust but also in other genocides, such as in the prisons of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, where subjects were photographed before being imprisoned, and then killed, resulting in extensive photographic archives.¹⁶⁸ Once people entered the camps they were not considered to be human beings any more, but archived objects, carefully classified and ordered. Many academics have pondered over the reasons for using this method, and some argue that the classification represents a form of objectification, an important element in the process of dehumanising the inmates, making it easier to systematically kill them.¹⁶⁹ This objectification leading to the killings of millions of human beings certainly brings a threatening dimension, and a very uncanny aspect, to the archive and to archival principles in general. And this is why Pálsson's archive of biological samples of Icelandic people becomes extremely uncanny: because it evokes uncanny associations with the archival principles at work in the Holocaust, as well as in other genocides, where human subjects are objectified and transformed into archived documents, before being killed. Here it is important to note that Pálsson did not have any connections with politics, nor does he mention in his notes any reference to racial hierarchy.¹⁷⁰ Still his archive presents memories and material that becomes

¹⁶⁷ These two images from *Nuit et Brouillard* are to be found in van Alphen's book *Staging the Archive*.

¹⁶⁸ Van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 211. In the reference notes van Alphen also discusses the important function of the archive for the regulations of apartheid in South Africa and for totalitarian regimes such as Argentina's military dictatorship. Aleida Assmann discusses the relation between archives and totalitarian ideologies in her discussion of the Stasi Files in *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 328.

¹⁶⁹ van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 216.

¹⁷⁰ Pálsson and Guðbjörnsson describe Pálsson as a seminal figure for the establishment of anthropology in Iceland but also ask why he pursued anthropology studies in Germany, considering the influence of Nazism on that field of study and its "vulnerable position" in post-war Germany. His interest in different races seems to have been well received in Mainz, according to the authors, where he established a strong network for his research. The authors

much more politically problematic than the plaster casts of *Musée Islandique*, by prompting questions such as: how, at this point in time and in light of the atrocities of the Holocaust, can an anthropologist educated in Germany, have been serious about experiments of racial difference? Some have pointed out that the positive interest in the origins of the Icelandic race puts the experiments in a different category from the experiments performed, for example, during the Second World War. That explanation is limited, however, since both types of experiments are based on the same ideology; racism, and the belief that racial difference is a scientific fact, not a cultural construction. In this sense, I would argue that the haunting impact of *Das Experiment Island* series is more critical and problematic to present-day viewers than *Musée Islandique*, because it raises questions that are more difficult to answer than the questions raised by the photographs of the plaster casts, which can to a certain extent be clarified by the historical context of colonialism. The haunting quality of the *Das Experiment Island* archive is encouraged by the feeling of *urgency*, and the need for seeking answers to questions that have hitherto not been raised. These are questions about race, and about the complicated position of Icelanders in European thought; while Iceland, in light of its legacy of Sagas and Eddas, has been conceptualised as a Germanic utopia, Icelanders were also seen as barbarians who needed to be colonised and civilised.¹⁷¹ How is this contradictory position reconciled when considering the present-day, public national identity? *Das Experiment Island*'s strong visual connotations of the Holocaust also raise questions on the impact of World War II on Icelanders. While other European nations suffered during the war, Iceland gained; occupation by British and later US forces brought prosperity, and pushed the Icelandic nation into modernity, raising the quality of life for the general Icelander, and the nation gained its full independence during the war in 1944, when Denmark was occupied by Nazis. Historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson discusses how the war and its impact on the history of Iceland have not been much addressed in “historical and political debates,” pointing to the silencing of the events in contemporary discussion.¹⁷² He further states that there are several reasons for this silence, one being that the occupation does not fit within the “Icelandic national narrative” which is primarily grounded in the story of how Icelanders gained their independence “through full sovereignty of the Icelandic

describe how successful he was in raising funds for his experiments, and the interest the media and press showed him and his work, which, according to them, reflects the widespread interest in the history and origin of Icelanders as a nation and as a race. “*Musée Islandique: An Encounter between Physical Anthropology and Art*”, 49.

¹⁷¹ Sumarliði Ísleifsson, “Icelandic National Images in the 19th and 20th Centuries” in *Images of the North: Histories – Identities – Ideas* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2009), 149 – 158, 150.

¹⁷² Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “‘The Beloved War’: The Second World War and the Icelandic National Narrative” in *Nordic Narratives of the Second World War: National Historiographies Revisited*, ed. Henrik Stenius, Mirja Österberg & Johan Östling (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011), 79 – 100, 79.

state and the preservation of their national culture.”¹⁷³ In other words, there seems to be little space for foreign influence in the narratives that support present-day ideas on cultural memory and national identity in Iceland.

What kind of memories?

By projecting a spectral reading on the two series of photographs, certain questions come to the fore which focus on their double dimension in terms of haunting: what is haunting these photographs, and why do they have haunting impacts on their viewers? Simply stated, the answer is to be found in colonialism, or more precisely in the contradictory position of Icelanders in the context of Scandinavian colonialism. The forgetting of these memories might be inflected with silencing and shame, and the archives both contain material from the past that might be defined as “shameful,” since it does not conform to what present-day viewers consider politically correct or honourable. They do so, however, in different ways. The former, *Musée Islandique*, characterises the Icelandic nation as victims to a certain extent, since it presents Icelanders as potential colonised subjects and therefore secondary citizens of the imperialist world. That is a memory that can be difficult to digest for the proud national identity that usually emphasises the independence of the nation, but can somehow be addressed and disregarded in light of the historical circumstances of the period. The later archive, that of *Das Experiment Island*, presents Icelanders at the opposite end of the spectrum, as active yet ignorant agents taking part in experiments based on dangerous ideology, and therefore disregarding the recent suffering of other nations and cultural groups. Both cases can be related to Paul Connerton’s term of forgetting as *humiliated silence*; when something is systematically kept in the state of forgetting, silenced and censored, due to shame and humiliation:

Perhaps it is paradoxical to speak of such a condition as evidence for a form of forgetting, because occasions of humiliation are so difficult to forget; it is often easier to forget physical pain than to forget humiliation. Yet few things are more eloquent than a massive silence. And in the collusive silence brought on by a particular kind of collective shame there is detectable both a desire to forget and sometimes the actual effect of forgetting.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Hálfðanarson, “‘The Beloved War’”, 80.

¹⁷⁴ Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting”, 67.

However, and in order to emphasize both the positive and negative aspects of forgetting, Connerton stresses this act of silencing as a mode of survival: “Nevertheless, some acts of silence may be an attempt to bury things beyond expression and the reach of memory; yet such silencing, while they are a type of repression, can at the same time be a form of survival, and the desire to forget may be an essential ingredient in that process of survival.”¹⁷⁵ Does the silencing of these memories express a mode of survival, or is it rather the result of an inability to deal with the colonial past? During a symposium in March 2015 in Reykjavík on the artwork, the artist described how difficult it was for her to gain access to Pálsson’s archive and to be allowed to photograph the material, which is kept in the storage of the University of Iceland. This closed access highlights the possible repressive dimension of the archive, or the act of keeping something systematically forgotten, underlining the inherent political aspect of the archive, as well as the material that for some reason cannot bear the light of day. It also raises the question of what other counter-memories might be lurking in the hidden cellars and attics of the University as well as other academic and cultural institutions, and who it is that controls access to these depots of cultural memory *curiosa*. Instead of trashing the archived material, destroying it, which would be, in Aleida Assmann’s terms, defined as a form of *active forgetting*, the archive becomes a space of *passive forgetting*; where memory material is allowed to continue to exist but in a *spectral* form, where it becomes decontextualised and disconnected, but has the potential of returning to the public realm at any time.¹⁷⁶ These spectral memories are clearly not part of the canon, but hidden away in storage and perhaps preserved in the cultural unconscious of some Icelandic people, who either remember seeing discussion on Pálsson in the media, or even took part in his experiments themselves. Coming back to the questions raised in the introduction to this chapter, on the meaning the two series have for contemporary Icelandic viewers, I argue that they destabilise traditional viewpoints on the communal past and cultural memory of Icelanders, by highlighting their status as colonised subjects, and evoking questions on foreign influence and interactions in Iceland.

Traces by Unnar Örn Auðarson

Contemporary visual artist Unnar Örn Auðarson (b. 1974) has for years drawn content and inspiration from various archives; state archives as well as personal archives of individuals kept in the storage spaces of different institutions and museums. He often displays found material,

¹⁷⁵ Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting”, 68.

¹⁷⁶ Assmann, “Canon and Archive”, 99.

photographs and objects from different archives together, in order to highlight the tension between public images of national history and the micro-history of the public. The focus point of this chapter is the artwork *Traces* from the exhibition *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: Part II* at the ASÍ gallery in 2014, where the artist displayed images from different archives to reflect on how visual imagery is used to construct and represent cultural and national identity. The exhibition is part of a series of exhibitions, hence the “Part II” in the title, and of a larger research project on visual documentation of resistance in Icelandic history. The project started with an exhibition in Akureyri in the north of Iceland in 2012, and concluded with the exhibition *Unrest* in Harbinger gallery in Reykjavík in 2016.¹⁷⁷ On the occasion of the last exhibition, an artist’s book with the same title was published and presented as the result of the artist’s research into the visual documentation of protest in the Icelandic cultural psyche.¹⁷⁸

The photographs in the *Traces* series are six in total, all black and white, portraying the aftermath of different protests. They seem to be some kind of documents or evidence showing how protests and riots have left visible damage to public properties. The images are displayed in pairs, two and two, with each pair having visual similarities. Two of the images portray places that have important historical value by being sites of administrative power: Government House, spattered with black tar, Alþingishúsið (Parliament House), with broken windows (images 1.13 and 1.14). Another pair portrays traces of an indoor struggle. Icelandic viewers immediately identify the chamber in Parliament House (image 1.15), while viewers of older generations might remember the fight that took place in the I.O.G.T. hall in Reykjavík in 1932 (image 1.16) between workers and the police. The riots broke out after a city council meeting in the hall, where the local authorities decided to lower wages for relief work, during the Great Depression.

¹⁷⁷ Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: Part I* in Akureyri in 2012, *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: Part II*, exhibition at the ASÍ Art Museum in 2014 and *Unrest*, exhibition at Harbinger gallery in 2016.

¹⁷⁸ Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Óeirð = Unrest* (2016). While the focus of my analysis is aimed at the ASÍ exhibition in 2014, I will also make references to the artist’s book from the exhibition at Harbinger in 2016. The first exhibition in the series, part I, consisted of a one photograph which was also on display at the second exhibition, part II. It shows Parliament House with broken windows following the NATO riots in 1949, a rather unusual image of this authoritative symbol of cultural memory. I will therefore not discuss the first exhibition in any detail but only mention it here in the introduction as a starting point for the project.



Image 1.13 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 23 September 1981. An image showing Government House on Lækjargata spattered with gobs of tar. Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print.



Image 1.14 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 30 March 1949. Image of Austurvöllur square depicting the aftermath of the Althingi agreeing to Iceland joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print.



Image 1.15 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 31 March 1949, An image of the Parliamentary chamber depicting the aftermath of Iceland's entrance into North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print.



Image 1.16 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 9 November 1932 An image of the meeting room in the Good Templars Hall on the corner of Vonarstræti and Templarasund, after a city council meeting. Photograph: Reykjavik Museum of Photography, Magnús Ólafsson [1862- 1937], 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print.



Image 1.17 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 17 February 1953. An image of the hot-water tanks of the Reykjavik public heating utility at Öskjuhlíð hill. Photograph: National Archives of Iceland; From the Archives of Reykjavik Police Department. 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print.

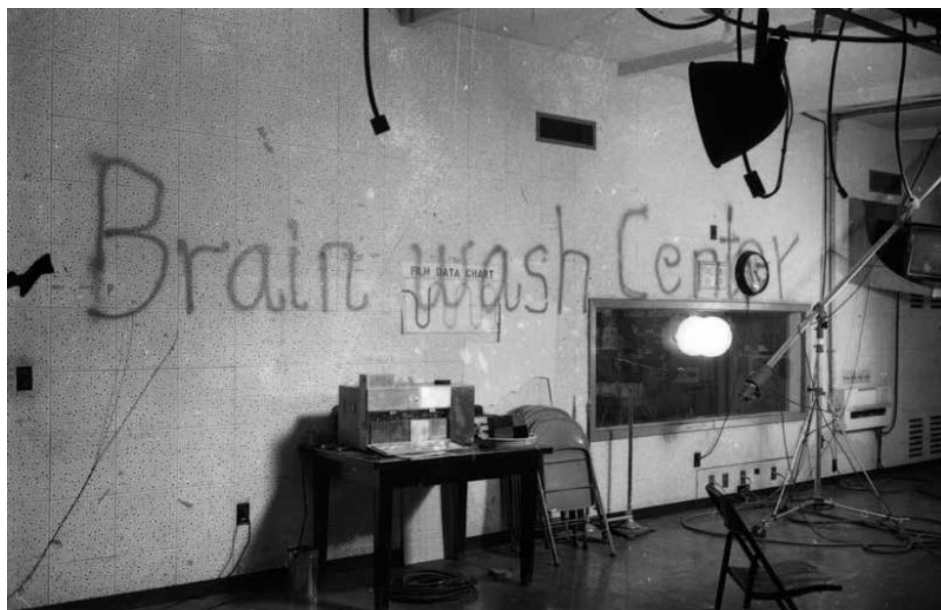


Image 1.18 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Traces*, 16 November 1969. An image of the television studio at the NATO base on Miðnesheiði, near Keflavik. Photograph: Archive of the newspaper Tíminn; attributed to Guðjón Einarsson [1924- 2004] 56 x 70 cm - Archival Pigment Print.

The third pair consists of two images portraying texts or graffiti found in different locations. One image shows how a line from the Icelandic national anthem has been written on the walls of large water tanks, with the symbol of the American dollar appearing in the middle of the sentence replacing the word “God”: “ó, \$ vors lands” (Engl. *land of our God/\$*, image 1.17). The other image portrays text written in English: “brain wash center” inside what seems to be a broadcasting studio (image 1.18).

No captions were placed within the exhibition space explaining the context of each image. Questions on the date and place of each photograph were therefore left unanswered, as well as the particular event or issue that sparked the protests. The lack of captions and text draws attention to how photographs give information visually: here, how the damage portrayed presents these places as sites of struggle and conflict. Viewers could, however, find additional information on each photograph in the exhibition catalogue where the aim of exhibition was also stated:

The topic of this exhibition is the preservation of public information related to popular opposition to ruling powers. The narrative of popular unrest is continually effaced from citizens’ collective memory. Windowpanes are replaced, walls repainted, security barriers removed. Yet at the same time evidence of unrest is ceaselessly collected by organs of power; this record then forms a continuous narrative maintained in public documents. Production of national consciousness is a recurring motif in this exhibition, to a bass accompaniment of fragments of recent history.¹⁷⁹

The focus point of my analysis is how *Traces* highlights the elusive testimonial function of photographs, especially when they are detached from their caption or original archival registration. The artwork demonstrates how the artist conjures up the spectre not only by drawing out hidden and lost memories out of the shadowy storage space of the archive and into the daylight of the exhibition gallery, but also enables the abstract potential of the archived document. This makes *Traces* a highly interesting example of spectral memories. This last point brings forth how the context determines the reading of archived documents: while momentarily losing its meaning when passively stored in the archive, the archived material has the potential

¹⁷⁹ *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: Part II*, exhibition catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition at the ASÍ Art Museum, 15 March to 6 April, 2014.

of acquiring new meanings in new contexts. In Aleida Assmann's terms, the artist uses the meta-memory of the archive to question the public construction of cultural memory, and the spectral force of counter-memories to destabilize current notions on national identity. I will discuss the spectral elusiveness of the photograph as an archival document in more detail below, but first a little bit more about the artwork in question.

Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: Part II

The exhibition took place at the former gallery space of ASÍ, the Icelandic Confederation of Labour, Ásmundarsalur in downtown Reykjavík.¹⁸⁰ The gallery consisted of one spacious showroom on the second floor and two smaller showrooms on the first floor. The *Fragments* exhibition made use of all three rooms of the gallery, while the artwork *Traces* was placed in the showroom on the second floor. It consists of six black-and-white photographs that are *ghostly* or *spectral* because they suggest an impression of *haunting*; though they appear empty by not portraying any human subjects, they show damage and traces pointing to conflicts that have taken place just before the photograph was taken. The photographs are displayed in pairs on the walls of the gallery. The visual similarities of each pair suggest a visual theme that can be found in Icelandic protest history. That history is usually not celebrated publicly, but the exhibition *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest* demonstrates how that history is to be found in spectral form within different archives. The title indicates how these testimonies of protest appear to be kept in small fragments and scattered over different archives, as well as implying how, when brought together, they form a continuous narrative that *spectralises* the official cultural memory.

The different visual themes illustrate how protesters express their resistance by damaging buildings and places owned by the authorities: edifices such as Parliament House and Government House (image 1.13, 1.14). A different theme shows how this act of resistance moves indoors and impacts the work that goes on there (image 1.15, 1.16). Another theme displays how protesters express their disapproval with texts, poetic slogans or ironic expressions, which they write in carefully selected places (image 1.17, 1.18). Location plays a vital part in every case. The attack on buildings such as Parliament House and Government House shows how protesters attack concrete sites of authority, and the location of graffiti is crucial for its meaning and signification. One can imagine that a political text written in

¹⁸⁰ The house was originally designed and built in 1933 on the initiative of artist Ásmundur Sveinsson, who lived and worked there. It served as a gallery space until it was sold in the spring of 2016 to a private party.

frequented areas and on eye-catching properties is aimed towards the public passing through the area, but that activists who select a more hidden location, especially indoors, aim their message towards a smaller group, perhaps a group that is related directly to the property, such as the owners of the buildings, or staff.

The exhibition raises questions about the origins of the photographs and purpose; where do these photographs come from, and why were they captured in the first place? Here the exhibition catalogue serves its purpose by stating that four of six photographs of *Traces* are from the Reykjavík Police Investigations Archive, stored at the National Archive of Iceland. Their location draws attention to how these photographs are originally meant to be important pieces of evidence for prosecution by the official authorities of protesters or the public. In this sense, they have a very clear function and a distinctive role in proving how individuals have offended against the law by violating state property. The text also illustrates how the photographs are from different times and from different places but that a coherent visual documentation of protests has been conducted: a documentation that covers a period of many years and is carefully preserved in the aforementioned investigation archives of the Reykjavík Police, as well as at the Reykjavík Museum of Photography and in the archive of the newspaper *Tíminn*, from whose archives the other two photographs originate. The archive as instrument of power becomes evident in the context of the investigation archives and grants the black-and-white *Traces* photographs a testimonial aura: stressing their function as evidence in official investigations and possible litigation where they are supposed to prove visually how a protester is guilty in the eyes of the law. Here, the location, or rather the context, of these photographs is of the utmost importance, highlighting their status as source of evidence of criminality. By collecting them from the archive, in other words by allowing them to return from the shadowy space of the archive and to enter the public domain of cultural memory in the art gallery, the artist disconnects them from their original meaning. By placing them in a new context a new reading is enabled, and the potential of granting these photographs new meanings.

The photograph as an archival record

Photographs have generally been considered a trustworthy source, possessing the ability to prove that certain events took place, for example for news stories, historical accounts or even as evidence for prosecutions. The photograph is supposed to be true, objective, honest, and show something that really happened. The photograph is usually considered to have the status of a “recorded fact” by being a “pictorial testimony,” and is somehow believed to be able to

transmit neutral images of reality. That is why photography has often been considered above all the *medium* of memory, or as Silke Heidelberg states: “The trace of memory, whose innate quality is fleetingness, becomes fixed in the photograph and turns into the alleged evidence of a ‘have taken place.’”¹⁸¹ This highlights the preservation potential of the camera and its ability to reproduce visual images of reality from different times. This potential is, however, not free from complexities, or as Douwe Draaisma elucidates: “perhaps no technology has been deployed with such enthusiasm against forgetting as photography, yet none contains so many paradoxes in its relationship with memory.”¹⁸² This last point elucidates the general, yet complex, connection photography has to memory, by being a visual representation of and from the past, as well as indicating how that image of the past can be read in different ways.

While the photographic image is usually seen as supporting memory, Siegfried Kracauer sees it as challenging memory. He states that while the memory image, i.e. the embedded representation of memory, is highly selective and focuses only on what is significant, the photograph grasps everything in front of the camera in the spur of one moment.¹⁸³ Or, as he writes: “Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum: memory images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance. Since what is significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or temporal terms, memory images are at odds with photographic representation.”¹⁸⁴ The photograph does not reveal anything of its subject: it does not tell its story, where it comes from, or anything about its background. It only captures it in a passing moment, making it both unstable and passive, according to van Alphen: “The problem is that, like archival texts and documents, most photographs have the status of non-fictional testaments to what once was. But as images they do not articulate their content, opening up to a plurality of readings. As testimonies of the past they do not translate easily into words.”¹⁸⁵ The photograph is different from other archival documents that are based on written texts, such as legal documents that record certain acts and transactions: “In contrast to other kinds of documents, photographs are never just established records of the past; once severed from their referents they can always be read differently.”¹⁸⁶ The archival category appointed to the

¹⁸¹ Silke Heidelberg, *Fragments, Futures, Absence and the Past: A New Approach to Photography* (Transcript Verlag, 2016), 147. The “have taken place” is a reference to Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage at Random House, 2000). More on Barthes below.

¹⁸² Douwe Draaisma, *Forgetting: Myths, Perils and Compensations*, trans. Liz Waters (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 8.

¹⁸³ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸⁶ van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 27.

photograph is therefore fundamental and directs how it is read and given meaning, since it grants the photograph a context, tying it to concrete time-space settings.

But what happens when time passes and information on the origins of the photograph is lost? It is easy to understand and *read* the photograph when it keeps its position as a record carefully classified in the archive and when it is directly related to a specific event, time and place. In this sense, the meaning of the photograph is static, fixed and unchangeable. When the photograph loses its place within the archive, when it is, for example, removed from the archive and disconnected from the original cataloguing, this static understanding is lost. It thus loses its value as a secure source and its purpose as invulnerable evidence. When there is no central referent to direct the viewer of the photograph, its numerous details come to the fore, suggesting and evoking different types of reading and ways of approaching the photograph. When the context is lost the photograph becomes “passive,” in Assmann’s terms, disconnected and thus open to new interpretations and meanings. Photographs can therefore have the force of questioning memory and putting remembering to the test, asking if the photographic image conforms to dominant narratives and representations of the past, or not. Here, the image of the Parliament House with broken windows comes to mind, presenting a rather unusual image of this official symbol of cultural and national memory. This highlights the abstract, or rather, *spectral* potential of the photograph and its possibility in *negotiating* memory. The photograph has the potential of acquiring new purpose because it can be given a new meaning and be interpreted differently from before. This makes the photographic form elusive and nonconcrete like a *spectre*.

Photograph as spectre

The elusiveness of the photographic medium is enabled by its ambiguous ontology. The photograph can in that regard be compared to the spectre, in Derrida’s terms, since it announces a presence that is contradictorily but simultaneously absent. It even can become *haunting* when its referent is forgotten and lost, but for some reason “returns” to the realm of the present. In a commemorative text on Roland Barthes, Derrida describes the spectral potential of the photograph:

Though it is no longer *there* (present, living, real), its *having-been-there* presently a part of the referential or intentional structure of my relationship to the photogram, the return of the referent takes the form of haunting. This is a ‘return

of the dead,' whose spectral arrival in the very space of the photogram indeed resembles that of an emission or emanation. Already a sort of hallucinating metonymy: it is something else, a piece come from the other (from the referent) that finds itself in me, before me, but also in me like a piece of me.¹⁸⁷

Thus, undermining the evidential force of the photograph, Derrida emphasises its unstable nature and its arbitrariness, how it can disturb ontology with the chronological disruption it brings. This is in contradiction to Barthes' melancholic conceptualisation of the photograph in *Camera Lucida*. Barthes looks at the photograph as a "certificate of presence" that presents a fixed image of something that was. The "this-has-been" or "ça a été" is, according to Barthes, the *noeme* or the essence of the photograph.¹⁸⁸ This belief leads Barthes, when mourning his recently deceased mother, to find what he believes to be her true essence in a photograph he refers to as the *Winter Garden photograph*, that portrays his mother as a little girl.¹⁸⁹ One evening, overburdened with sorrow for his late mother, Barthes goes through a box of photographs and finds the Winter Garden photograph, a picture portraying the mother as a little girl posing in a "winter garden." Barthes describes the mother as innocent and kind, two attributes he associates with his mother in her adult life, and therefore stating that the photograph manages to capture the "essence" of the mother's personality and character. Kracauer, on the other hand, describes how the reading of a photograph of his grandmother from when she was young is relational and bound to its context. He would not believe the young woman in the photograph to be his grandmother, if his parents had not told him so.¹⁹⁰ In that sense, "oral tradition," as he describes it, that surrounds the photograph determines its contextualisation; how it is read and understood. He draws similarities between the image of the grandmother and a picture of a film diva found in a newspaper.¹⁹¹ The visual resemblance between the two women is striking, but the context of each photograph determines how it is read: the public context of the newspaper associates the diva with the popular culture of the time, while the archival context of the family album enables Kracauer to see the figure in the photograph as his grandmother.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 54. [italics in original].

¹⁸⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76-77.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁹⁰ Kracauer, "Photography", 48.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 47-8.

¹⁹² van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 28.

Spectrality, and the emphasis on the spectre that haunts, undermines the stable and static memory and memory-making of photographs. Ulrich Baer, for instance, states in his *Spectral Evidence* that: “photographs are unsettling. Some images bypass painstaking attempts at contextualization and deliver, straight up and apparently across the gulf of time between viewer and a photographically mummified past, a potent illusion of the real.”¹⁹³ In specifying spectrality in photography, Baer calls for the activation of the critical consciousness of the viewer: “to identify ‘historically constructed ways of seeing’ in an attempt to prevent the photograph from enmeshing the viewer in the medium’s illusion of a ‘frozen moment.’”¹⁹⁴ While Baer aims at reconceptualising the reading of photographs in order to acknowledge trauma, and to *bear witness* in an ethical sense when looking at images related to the Holocaust, his remarks can also be useful when looking at photographs that bear witness to different types of events, especially events that, like traumatic memories, do not make their presence felt in the official cultural memory, and have not gained their place within public narratives. While some of the images discussed by Baer express *nothingness*, the images from *Traces*, the artwork by Unnar Örn Auðarson, express everything but nothingness, being photographs that are filled with details that point to the event that took place just before the photograph was captured. However, without a concrete context, such as an exact date and location, these photos express an ambiguity in how to understand, read or contextualise their multiple details. In this regard, they are rendered mute when stripped from their context, and their political potency diminished, which undermines their function as visual testimonies. This suggests a paradox, when photographs filled with visual details express nothing: in their plenitude but without any directed focus, their interpretation becomes *relative* and *negotiable*, and entirely based on the viewer’s projection and position when looking at them.

Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest: *The photograph and national imagery*

The black-and-white photographs of protests, titled *Traces*, were not the only images on display in the exhibition *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest, Part II*, and not the only artwork located in the showroom on the second floor of Ásmundarsalur. A large upright poster had been placed on the floor in the middle of the gallery, in between the photographs, in dialogue with the images of the aftermath of protests (image 1.19). The poster is an enlarged old photograph. It is taken in a studio and portrays a woman wearing the Icelandic national costume, posing in front of a

¹⁹³ Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. Here Baer quotes Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990). [no page number].

painted background of a spouting hot spring. What is rather unusual is that the woman turns her back to the photographer, and therefore to the viewers, suggesting that she is looking at the magnificent hot spring behind her and encouraging viewers to do the same. The poster was positioned in front of a black curtain hung on the wall behind it, as if to frame the image and enhance its impact (image 1.20). A similar black curtain was also be found in another part of the showroom: in a corner from where one heard a murmur from a crowd gathered to celebrate an unknown event.



Image 1.19 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Fragments from The Deeds of Unrest: Part II*, Exhibition view. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson



Image 1.20 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Niðurinn (Murmur)*. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson

The image of the woman evokes a tradition of visual representations of national identities. This national imagery comes to the fore during a national celebration, such as on June 17, the Icelandic national day. The national costume worn by the woman in the picture highlights this reading, as does the hot spring in the background. The Icelandic landscape is intimately connected with national identity, and natural themes are used to represent Icelandic nationality. This explains why, for example, waterfalls and glaciers are used when creating visual images of what it means to be Icelandic. Images of this kind are easy to find in public spaces: i.e. in press photos during national days of celebration but also in the imagery of advertisements marketing everything Icelandic, from dairy, through fashion to the Icelandic football team. This national imagery is, of course, also deployed when Iceland is marketed as a tourist destination, or takes part in international fairs.

Ethnographer Kristinn Schram has written about this image construction and states that: “The so-called pearls of Icelandic nature are a recurring theme and the vast ‘untouched’ wilderness of the highland interior is showcased and considered by Icelanders as their common land and responsibility.”¹⁹⁵ It seems to be a tradition to relate any ideas on Icelandic nationality and identity to ideas of unspoiled and unique nature. Schram asks further whether this “sublime image” reflects how the ordinary Icelander sees herself, or if it is “simply some prefabricated

¹⁹⁵ Kristinn Schram, “The Wild Wild North: the Narrative Cultures of Image Construction in Media and Everyday Life” in *Images of the North: Histories, Identities, Ideas*, ed. Sverrir Jakobsson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 249-260, 255.

market image in little connection with the identity”.¹⁹⁶ This tradition of creating a national image seems to date far back. Sumarliði Ísleifsson states that the image of Iceland throughout the ages was constructed by foreigners, for example through travel narratives, who conceptualised it as either utopia or dystopia.¹⁹⁷ Ísleifsson describes how Icelanders adopt this foreign viewpoint in the late twentieth century and hold on to the image of unique wilderness and sublime nature when describing themselves and their surroundings.¹⁹⁸

The photograph of the woman looking at the hot spring comes from a collection of *cartes de visite*: portrait photographs in a small format created before 1890, a sort of postcard people had made of themselves in order to give to others.¹⁹⁹ It can be considered the predecessor to the business card, or even to modern day social media where people upload photographs of themselves to make them known to other people around the world. The photograph was taken in a studio in Denmark around 1870 and the original caption on the postcard reads, in both French and Danish, “a girl from Iceland,” suggesting that the photograph is supposed to represent a national identity, or made in order to give a visual representation of what it means to be a young woman from Iceland.²⁰⁰ This information strengthens the interpretation of the image of the hot-spring woman being in tune with a tradition of creating national imagery and visual image of Icelandic identity. What is, however, striking about this particular *carte-de-visite* is how the woman turns her back on the photographer, as if refusing to show her face.

During the *Fragments* exhibition, the image of the national hot spring woman becomes a representative for the staging of national identity and creates a tension with the human-less protest photographs. The image of the lady is not a framed photograph, like the other photographs on the wall, but looks like an advertising hoarding or a promotional sign. When placed together, these different types of image suggest a dialogue, emphasising the haunting qualities of the *Traces* photographs, as images that haunt Icelandic marketing imagery, and, more precisely in the context of the exhibition, the image of the hot-spring lady that combines the national costume and natural theme in one image. Viewers will also note that it only contains a front, and no back (image 1.21) perhaps echoing the position of the woman in the photograph, and highlighting how she turns her back on viewers, as well as looking away from the black-

¹⁹⁶ Schram, “The Wild Wild North”, 255.

¹⁹⁷ Sumarliði Ísleifsson, “Icelandic National Images in the 19th and 20th Centuries” in *Images of the North*, 149 – 158, 150.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁹⁹ *Sjónarhorn: ferðalag um íslenskan myndheim*, ed. Markús Þór Andrésson (Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn, 2015), 109.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

and-white protest photographs. However, the position of the lady in the picture, and the fact that she does not face the camera, make it a highly unusual *carte de visite* and an ambiguous image of national identity, prompting the central question; why can't this lady face her audience? Is she turning her back on the protest photographs, as if trying to deny their haunting impact, their disturbance? Or is she siding with these memories of protests, turning her back on the photographer, who directs and constructs this gaze on national identity, or on us viewers who accept this static-like national stereotype?



Image 1.21 Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Fragments from The Deeds of Unrest: Part II*, Exhibition view. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson.

Fragments: *murmur of a nation*

Traces are displayed alongside public images that are important to the “cultural consciousness” of the nation, as stated in the exhibition catalogue, or to what I would term *canonic* and public images of national cultural memory. The poster of the woman looking at the hot spring is an independent artwork, but its title “Murmur” (Niðurinn) strongly links it to other works on display in the exhibition. First, it connects it to the aforementioned sound installation placed in one of the corners of the showroom behind a black curtain; the sound could be coming from a crowd gathered to celebrate something, hence the title murmur. The title relates to a different artwork on display downstairs in the exhibition, “Mise en Scène [21. Apríl 1971],” a video

screening of a live television broadcast of the celebration of when two medieval manuscripts were handed over to the Icelandic nation by the Danish State (image 1.22).

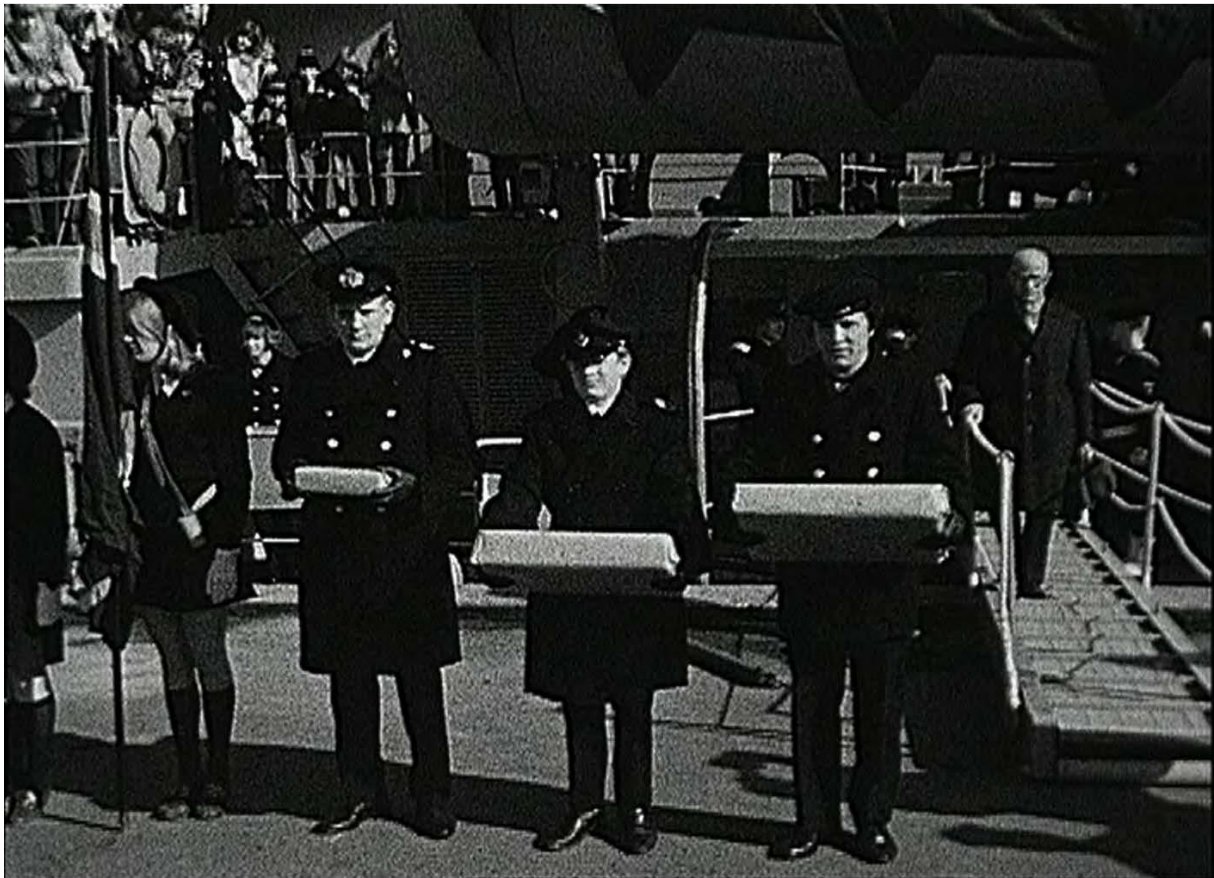


Image 1.22 Unnar Örn Auðarson, Still from: *Mise en Scène* [21 April 1971] 8.35 min. loop. From the documentary archives of the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RÚV).

In *The Return of Cultural Treasures*, Jeanette Greenfield describes the handover as a successful return of cultural treasure.²⁰¹ In the late seventeenth century, when Iceland was part of Denmark, Danish authorities started to send representatives out on quests to locate and collect the various manuscripts written and created in Iceland. The manuscripts, both vellum and paper, preserved the medieval saga literature of Iceland, and the oldest were made in the twelfth century. In the early eighteenth century an Icelandic scholar, Árni Magnússon, who had studied and lived in Copenhagen, arrived in Iceland to continue with the collection work. The manuscripts were stored in the Royal Library and the Royal Archives in Copenhagen, and later moved to the Arnamagnæan Institute which is still today a part of Copenhagen University.

²⁰¹ Jeanette Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Icelanders became interested in reclaiming the manuscripts as early as the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when romantic ideas of the nation state were influencing Icelandic students in Copenhagen. The fight for the manuscripts, however, became intense in 1945, a year after Iceland had gained its independence.²⁰² After a long and sometimes hard struggle, the handover took place in 1971, and symbolised for many the end of the fight for independence: a way of gaining full cultural independence from the former Danish ruler.²⁰³ The handover therefore plays a vital part in the history of the Icelandic nation state. For some, Icelandic nationhood is even embodied by the manuscripts, as they believe them to contain and represent the true Icelandic cultural identity.²⁰⁴ The video of the ceremony of the handover is one of two artworks from the *Fragments* exhibition that portray *canonic* cultural memories that are deemed fundamental for the collective cultural identity of the nation.

The symbols of national identity presented in the *Fragments* exhibition both have strong ties to colonialism: the handing over of the manuscripts played an important part in authenticating cultural independence from the foreign ruler, and the photograph of the woman is aimed at “foreign” eyes during the imperialist period, and seems to come from a collection of similar photographs.²⁰⁵ Photographic archives have proven to be important for the representation of national identity, perhaps because they give a reiterated visual image of what a nation *should* look like. Elizabeth Edwards states that it is no coincidence that the invention of photography emerged at a similar historical time as new ideas of nationhood.²⁰⁶ In the book *Photographic Archives and the Idea of Nation*, Edwards and other scholars discuss the function of the photographic archive in establishing and constructing national identities. Joan Schwartz writes: “photographs, interposed between physical reality and viewing subject, have embodied, reflected, and helped to forge, promote, and perpetuate the idea of nation.”²⁰⁷ Here it is also important to stress how representational photographs have been securely selected and chosen,

²⁰² Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures*, 15.

²⁰³ Only some of the manuscripts were repatriated, as many are still kept at Arnarnagæan Institute in Copenhagen.

²⁰⁴ Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures*, 13.

²⁰⁵ This carte de visite was a part of the exhibition *Sjónarhorn* (e. *Point of View*) in Safnahúsið, the Culture House, formerly known as Þjóðmenningarhúsið or The House of National Culture. The exhibition gathers different relics of cultural memory that are preserved in various state collections, and give a visual representation of what the exhibition representatives refer to as “Icelandic imagery”. Here it is placed in a context with others cartes de visite or photographs from a similar time of young women posing in a studio in Icelandic national costumes with painted backgrounds, who, however, all turn their face toward the photographer and thus viewers. *Sjónarhorn*, 109.

²⁰⁶ Elizabeth Edwards, “Photographs as Strong History?” in *The Photographic Archives and the Idea of Nation*, ed. Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 321-2.

²⁰⁷ Joan Schwartz, “Photographic Archives and the Idea of Nation: Images, Imaginings, and Imagined Community” in *The Photographic Archives*, 17-40, 19.

even staged, for representing national identities. This suggests also the numerous photographs that *have not* been chosen to represent a national identity.

And here the term “nation” becomes critical, as it seems to evade strict definitions. Edwards explains how the idea of a “nation is defined through a series of imaginative and symbolic acts that constitute what people believe about themselves” and are often bound to territorial locations.²⁰⁸ Nation is based on the conception of how a group of individuals *shares* traits, such as territory, borders, language, memory, government, religion, etc. Due to the elusiveness of the term, and in order to emphasize its constructional aspect, Schwarz suggests employing Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined community” to reconcile the various meanings of nation. The term highlights how “nation” is above all imagined: “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”²⁰⁹ *Imagined* therefore refers to the “process that involves and results in the self-identification with a social community.”²¹⁰ Photography, and the series of photographs in the form of an archive, appear to construct a sense of belonging by tying visual images to a specific territory: “photographs demonstrate that the idea of a nation has been reflected in, inflected by, and refracted through the photographically and archivally mediated relationship between people and place.”²¹¹ The photographic archive in this context draws out the emphasis on visual media when discussing the construction of national identity and the idea of being able to *see* the national identity. In this context, the reiterated images of similar appearance aim at working against the *relative* and *negotiable* dimension of the photograph, trying to cover up how the photographs do not portray a static image but a dynamic one, open to multiple meanings. This reiteration inherent in the photographic archive of national identity also evokes the idea of exclusion; if you do not look a certain way you are not part of the nation, emphasising the authoritative function of the archive as an instrument of control and repression.

During the exhibition *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest*, the *Traces* photographs are no longer evidence that is supposed to prove protesters guilty, but forgotten memories that return to haunt static notions of dominant images of national identity. The *Traces* images of the damage done to state property during demonstrations disturb the staged image of cultural

²⁰⁸ Edwards, “Photographs as Strong History?”, 322.

²⁰⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6. From: Schwartz, “Photographic Archives”, 20.

²¹⁰ Schwartz, “Photographic Archives”, 23.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

memory, and disrupt the unified notion of national identity. The position of the lady who looks at the hot spring instead of facing her photographer makes it a highly ambiguous image of national identity, prompting questions that are difficult to answer. All of these images display a sense of unrest, and read symbolically as documents testifying to conflicts inherent in the term “nation” – whom it serves and how it is portrayed. They suggest how a nation consists of different groups whose memories tend not to be as linear and continuous as the construction of national memory, used to represent a national ideal. In the context of the exhibition, the *Traces* photographs lose their function as evidence of criminality and become evidence of different sorts as visual testimonies of resistance and conflicts. These photographs are spectral evidence that has haunting impacts on present-day viewers and bears witness to how a nation consists of different and diverse cultural groups, that might have little in common with the public image of national identity. The artist conjures up spectral memories from the archive to create the feeling of unrest: to disturb and disrupt the prevailing and official image in order to demonstrate that people do not agree on “Icelandic” identity or what the term “nation” reflects exactly.

Conclusion to chapter one: spectral memories of the institutional archive

In both artworks, the two series of photographs by Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique* and *Das Experiment Island*, as well as in the exhibition *Fragments from the Deeds of Unrest, Part II* by Unnar Örn Auðarson, the idea of *return* is of great importance: how forgotten or hidden memories re-enter the public domain by being invited to be on display in the showrooms of art institutions, under the label of contemporary art. In the former case, the spectral memories move from storage spaces located at the University of Iceland, as well as at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, to the National Gallery in Reykjavík, a clear example of a cultural institution displaying what Assmann terms the objects of the *canon*. The *Fragments* exhibition, on the other hand, documents the circulation of photographs from the Reykjavík Police Investigations Archives, stored at the National Archive of Iceland, the main institutional archive in the country, into a prestigious gallery space. In both cases, the pieces of art momentarily acquire their place in the canon, or in the public space of cultural memory, until they are moved back into their respective storage spaces. These two examples demonstrate the important function of contemporary art for cultural memory, and the impact individual artists can have on cultural institutions. For example, when artists present their research into the lost material of archives to present-day viewers, they make what has been lost physically present. By this they encourage a contemporary audience to read the past differently from before, and to rethink or reevaluate how

they construct their notion of past in the present. The circulation of these archived objects highlights the constant dynamics at stake in cultural memory: how memories can be recycled and rediscovered. It also shows how close Assmann's categories of "passive memory" and "passive forgetting" actually are, and how cultural relics can go through the cycle of being remembered and forgotten, bringing forth how the past is constantly being reconceptualised and reframed.

This evokes the concept of *memory activism*. Drawing on Yifat Gutman and her elaborations on the concept in her book *Memory Activism: Reimagining the past for the future of Israel-Palestine* from 2017, memory activism is a way to "cultivate counter-memory" and involves "initiatives to remember the shared past differently than how it is portrayed by the state."²¹² Ann Rigney describes how this field within cultural memory studies is recent, but fertile and growing, and how it harmonises with the idea of the dynamics of memory: "the memory-activism nexus is a complex one, a vortex of recycling, recollection and political action that can be summed up as 'civic memory'."²¹³ She further distinguishes between three emphases or focal points: *memory activism*, *memory of activism* and *memory in activism*. While the latter two are more focused on the historiography of activism, for example, how acts of resistance and protests often refer to earlier events of "struggles," the first is in line with the ideas expressed by Gutman: "how actors struggle to produce cultural memory and to steer future remembrance."²¹⁴ Memory activism is therefore of use when describing the works of both Ólöf Nordal and Unnar Örn Auðarson. The *Traces* photographs further relate to "memory-in-and-of-activism" as being visual documents of struggle and conflict.

Here the question of agency arises. If cultural memory is to be dynamic it needs active agents; artists, writers, historians and academics who collect lost memories from archives and mediate them to present-day viewers, encouraging them to be active in their reception of memories and critical in their reading of the past. It also draws attention to how the institutions of cultural memory – museums, gallery spaces, national archives, as well as publishing houses, or rather the people behind these institutions (directors, politicians, specialists and editors) – must be aware of this need for activity: to allow the institutional cultural memory to be dynamic and vibrant, in order to prevent stagnation, and so that cultural institutions do not become

²¹² Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism: Reimagining the past for the future of Israel-Palestine* (Nashville Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017), 2.

²¹³ Anne Rigney, "Remembering Hope: Transnational activism beyond the traumatic" *Memory Studies*, Vol. 11(3) 2018, 368–380, 372.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 372.

morgues. Using Derrida's terms it is possible to state that they need to learn how to live with spectres, how to react responsively to the haunting of revenants and to allow the conjuring up of ghosts – and the transformative memory encounter to take place. What is perhaps the most important aspect of all this – these two series of photographs that portray forgotten or hidden material from the past to present-day viewers, as well as when associating spectrality with cultural memory studies – is the future orientation inherent in spectrality: it is not only aimed at the past and present, but also at the future – not only “those others who are no longer”, but also “those others who are not yet there” – as Derrida states in *Specters of Marx*.²¹⁵ The spectre is not only a *revenant*, who returns from the past, but also an *arrivant*, announcing a progressive move towards the future and highlighting how the past is used to influence the future. Instead of becoming stuck in a melancholic aspect of memory, that only looks back at the past, there is the potential for influencing the future in a progressive way in responding responsibly to the haunting of spectres, for example by deconstructing and rejecting any homogeneous and static nationalist images of cultural identities, or myths about Iceland and the origins of its population.

²¹⁵ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xviii.

Chapter 2

Spectral memories from the family archive

This second chapter examines how the archive marks a shift in perspective from the broad public domain of cultural memory to the private and personal memory of individuals, or rather the intergenerational memory of the family. The family archive offers an opportunity to explore the dynamics of family memory, and here I examine how spectral memories of domestic archives are inherited between generations and how identity is formed in the context of the family. In this regard, the archive becomes a storehouse where the family memory is passively stored, giving family members the possibility of establishing links from past to the future, and unravelling the trauma that lies at the heart of the family's history. The novel *Fórnarleikar* (Sacrificial Games) from 2016 by Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir (b. 1938) addresses the spectral nature of the family archive, and describes how a writer sets out to write the story of his family by consulting archived material, old cassette tapes, a process that turns out to be both laborious and problematic. *Elín, ýmislegt* (*A Fist or a Heart*, 2019) is a novel from 2017 by author Kristín Eiríksdóttir (b. 1981) about a woman who embarks on writing her life story as she feels compelled to give a formal account of her life when the past knocks on her door in the form of three cardboard boxes containing material from her childhood. Family archives tend not be organised by the same archival orders and categorisation as official archives, but rather, as Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir states, appear as “collection of disparate material, mementoes whose original purpose may long have been forgotten, letters, and photographs.”²¹⁶ Even though this approach to the archive is familial and personal, it cannot be looked at in isolation from its political and historical connotations. The theoretical discussion on the archive in chapter one will therefore serve as a backdrop for my analysis in this chapter. In contrast to the institutional archive or the storage spaces of the museum, the *family archive* is concerned with the private and personal, the family album of photographs being perhaps one of the most common forms of family archive. By employing a spectral reading on the two novels, *Fórnarleikar* as well as *Elín, ýmislegt*, I will focus on the haunting impact of the spectral memories that are introduced in the narratives in the form of the family archive: boxes containing material and objects inherited from one generation to the other, encouraging the younger generation to delve into the past.

²¹⁶ Guðmundsdóttir, *Representations of Forgetting*, 63.

The family archive in Fórnarleikar: the spectral state of postmemories

Fórnarleikar is a novel by Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir, published in 2016, about an author who plans to write the story of his family by consulting the family archive which consists of recorded oral narratives from old cassette tapes. The novel starts with the writer Magni addressing the reader indirectly, describing his task of writing the family history: of five generations who have all lived in the house where he is living with his wife and sons, and where he works on his writings in a studio in the attic. He describes how, when renovating the house, he came upon cassette tapes hidden in cardboard boxes in the attic, material from the family archive. Magni finds out that the cassette tapes contain recorded interviews, or rather oral stories which his mother, Regína, collected from various members of the family. The novel consists of four parts and is structured around a revelation: as the narrative continues, the secrets and repressed memories of the family slowly come forward. It is divided into chapters titled with the different characters' names, indicating the focal point of each chapter. The chapters on Magni are in the first person, while the other chapters, on Regína his mother, Arndís his grandmother, and Guðgeir his grandfather, are written in the third person. This draws attention to the role of Magni as the storyteller of the third-person chapters, hinting at how the text is actually the story he is writing, constantly commenting on and referring to. The chapters are interwoven, meaning that the focal point of the story is constantly shifting, which creates a multi-discourse form or a polyphonic novel: where each character represents not only a certain viewpoint on the narrative itself, but also on memory and the events of the past. The narrative is not linear but goes back and forth in time, creating a complex and fragmented account of a family history, where date and place are never mentioned, merely hinted at.

Early on, Magni discusses the ambiguous status of the cassette tapes, as material that preserves the human voice as well as narratives from the past. The following quotation describes the tapes as *haunting*, and how Magni perceives them as spectral material, suggesting their status as *spectral memories*:

A voice on cassette is not linked to a body, as it has developed a life of its own. The voice has remained when the body left, and a similar haunting takes place in photographs. In them the moment is frozen forever even though everyone has gone, and they will stay there until this same moment, the facial expressions, the

smile, will be finally erased. The same applies to a sound that is recorded, in the end only silence will remain.²¹⁷

When no longer linked to its body, the voice lives on in a spectral form, and the cassette tapes start to haunt Magni. They are also *haunting* in more than one sense. Firstly, the voices of the past haunt the present, and thus the stories of older generations that follow younger generations, implying how Magni might feel the need to address them in order to attend to the family memory, and perhaps try to unravel the trauma that the family has repressed for years. Secondly, the spectral status of these memories highlights the precarious state of the tapes, as well as indicating that if no one handles them, takes care of them and listens to their stories, they will be left to silence. Magni even describes how he is tempted to throw them away when finding them, mainly because he does not own a tape recorder to access their material. The tapes have, at the period of writing, become obsolete as a technology of remembrance. The precarious state of the archive therefore creates an urgency for Magni, to work through its material before the material on the tapes will be entirely inaccessible, or the tapes thrown away and destroyed. That work is, however, not without complications, stressing the challenges of intergenerational memory, and the difficulties that a child faces when inheriting memories from parents, especially when the parent in question is deceased.

Magni's situation evokes Derrida's paradoxical ideas on the archive that simultaneously represses and preserves. While the preservation part indicates the possible return of lost memories and the hope that younger generations can gain access to the past of their parents, the repression emphasis also stresses how that is not always the case. For example, when the archive is ridden with gaps and holes, or contains material that is difficult to read through and understand, suggesting how later generations might fail to *activate* the passive archived memories of older generations. The gaps in the archive evoke Nicolas Abraham's idea of *phantom*, that illustrates how children inherit their parents phantom-like memories of secrets and traumas through forms of repression, silences and hesitation: "The phantom is, therefore, also a metapsychological fact. Consequently, what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left

²¹⁷ "[R]ödd á spólu tengist ekki líkama, líkt og hún hafi öðlast eigið líf. Röddin varð eftir þegar líkaminn fór, og svipaður draugagangur á sér stað með ljósmyndir. Á þeim er andartakið fryst að eilífu þó að allir séu farnir, og verða þar þangað til þetta sama andartak, svipbrigðin, brosið, þurrkast endanlega út. Hið sama gildir um hljóð sem tekið er upp, að lokum verður aðeins þögnin eftir." Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir, 11 (my translation). From here on I will refer to the novel in footnotes with page number in brackets. All translations are mine.

within us by the secrets of others.”²¹⁸ In the analysis that follows I focus on how the haunting of the spectral memories from the family archive influences as well as complicates the writing process for Magni, in his attempt at writing the family history.

Postmemory and the family trauma

Different terms have been used to describe the particular transmission of memory between generations within the family, and outside it, such as *absent memory*, *belated memory*, *haunting legacy*, to name a few.²¹⁹ In the late 1990s, Marianne Hirsch coined the term *postmemory* to address how memory, and in particular traumatic memory, of one generation impacts the generation who follows; “ ‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images and behaviours among which they grew up.”²²⁰ Hirsch’s point of departure is how the children of Holocaust survivors have dealt with the traumatic past of their parents in creative and imaginative ways. Trauma is described as creating a gap in memory due to the ungraspable nature of traumatic events that cannot be processed in memory like the memories of other, more “regular” events. Instead they are repressed by the subject who often seeks above all to forget the traumatic experience. Cathy Caruth emphasises the inability to express trauma with language. For her trauma is based on an *aporia* or paradox; the insoluble contradiction inbuilt in the need, yet impossibility, of verbalising the traumatic event that leads to its repression.²²¹

This act of forgetting affects the transmittance of the memories, or rather, in some cases, the lack of transmittance, since some parent survivors are not necessarily ready to discuss their painful experiences with their children. Instead of hearing about the events via oral recollection or storytelling, these children experience the traumatic memory through silence, hesitations, gossip, and when they accidentally overhear something.²²² Postmemory is therefore often characterised by the *inaccessibility* of the parents’ past and memories to the children, which for Hirsch means that they resort to imaginative ways and artistic methods when approaching the problematic and difficult family legacy. Hirsch emphasises how postmemory is based on

²¹⁸ Nicolas Abraham, “Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud’s Metapsychology” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 13, no. 2, *The Trials of Psychoanalysis* (Winter, 1987), 287-292, 287.

²¹⁹ See Hirsch’s discussion of the many different terms in *The Generation of Postmemory*, 3.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²²¹ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 91-2.

²²² Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

mediation rather than direct recall: “Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation [...] these events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.”²²³ This describes how children experience the memories of their parents in mediated forms, through oral stories or by looking through images in the family album. For large-scale events like the Holocaust, one must also consider the bigger picture of cultural memory, and the effects of public narratives and images on the parental dynamics of postmemory.

In her first book on the subject, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Hirsch analyses *Maus*, the comic novel by Art Spiegelman, an autobiographical work written about his parents’ past. They were Jews who survived the Holocaust and emigrated to the U.S., and Spiegelman’s childhood was influenced by their wartime stories as well as their psychological wounds caused by the experience from the concentration camps.²²⁴ In *The Generation of Postmemory* Hirsch revisits her concept, and nuances it by relating it to other traumatic events. She divides it into two different categories; *familial* postmemory, that describes the transmittance of *intergenerational* memory and the “vertical identification of child and parent within the family,” as well as *affiliative* postmemory; “the *intragenerational* horizontal identification that makes that child’s position more broadly available to other contemporaries.”²²⁵ While *familial* postmemory describes the intergenerational memory dynamics at work in the novel *Fórnarleikar*, the concept of *affiliative* postmemory might be useful to describe the other case studies in this chapter: where artists living in the present approach objects of memory from earlier times and of older generations. Hirsch explains her use of the prefix “post” in postmemory, which does not announce temporal delay nor a location in an aftermath, but a “critical distance and a profound interrelation,” like the one to be found in the postmodernist attitude toward modernism, as well as poststructuralist position to structuralism. On the same note, states Hirsch, postcolonialism does not suggest the end of colonialism, but its troubling continuity in a different form.²²⁶ Postmemory, therefore, shares the layering and belatedness of the other “post” discourses: “Postmemory reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture.”²²⁷ Postmemory stresses the complexities of

²²³ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

²²⁴ Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (New York: Pantheon, 1991).

²²⁵ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 36. Here she draws on Edward Said’s distinction between vertical filiation and horizontal affiliation in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

memory transmittance by highlighting how memory is inherently characterised by ruptures and breaks, silences and forgetting, instead of following a seemingly coherent chain of events where every lived moment is carefully commemorated. Overall, postmemory points out the *negotiable* aspect of memory and how memories function as dynamic representations rather than objects that are fixed in time and space. It is also described by the *urgency* and need of transmitting the traumatic memories further to prevent them from being forgotten.

And here is where postmemory coincides with the workings of the family archive. Rather than providing a physical space where the past can be retrieved, the archive seems only to provide limited access to the past. This seems to be the situation for Magni who sets out to write the story of his family only to discover his lack of knowledge and information about the past. Even though he is in possession of a rich collection of recorded family stories, he seems to be lacking information to contextualise and understand them. The family archive in his case makes the ruptures and gaps of the family history more tangible than before, pointing toward the traumatic event that shaped the life and memory of the different generations within the family.

The narrative revolves precisely around this trauma that influences not only the life of the characters, but also the narrative itself, or rather the failure thereof, because when Magni has attempted to work through the archived material, he decides to drop the work altogether and move on to a different project: to write a story that is completely fictional from beginning to end, echoing Hirsch's theory on how children with limited access to their parents' past resort to imaginative ways when writing their story. This inability to write the story of the family seems to be brought on by the lack of communication between the family members, who have not discussed the sudden suicide of Guðgeir, Regína's father, Arndís' husband and Magni's grandfather, which took place when Regína was only a child. The difficult memory of the suicide bears witness to the lack of contact between the father and his family at the moment it took place, suggesting how he did not discuss his mental problems with his family, wife and parents, as well as the possibility that they turned a blind eye to his troubles and pain. The suicide therefore came as a sudden and unforeseen shock. The repression and silence continues after the death of the father, as the family does not discuss the suicide, nor any other private and personal matters, between them. The daughter Regína seems not to have been able to discuss the tragic death of her beloved father with her mother, the widowed wife, nor with her elderly grandmother. This lack of contact seems to create a rupture in the mother/daughter relationship, resulting in moments of silence between the two women, who do not express their true

sentiments to each other, nor to anyone else. Magni describes how he has throughout his life made certain assumptions, without knowing anything for sure. He sensed the tense relationship between his mother and his grandmother, but was never sure what had caused it, and assumed it had something to do with the death of his grandfather. On a similar note, he writes about his own father, whom he did not know, and of whom his mother never spoke. He describes his father as being a “spectre” (76). He cannot remember his father’s face and has a distant and unclear notion of him, a superficial image created from the words of his grandmother, who was the only one who spoke to him of his father.

This transmittance of trauma between generations evokes Hirsch’s term of postmemory: Magni’s mother Regina is not capable of working through the trauma, for example, by narrativising it, and is therefore doomed to live unhappily, which in the end results in a severe mental illness, with her losing grip on reality and developing a drinking problem which causes her premature death. Her illness affects Magni in his upbringing and creates the need for him to work through the trauma, to unravel the traumatic memory, so as not to pass it on to the next generation as a spectral secret. In the terms of Abraham and Torok, whose theories I mentioned briefly in the introduction to this chapter, Magni wants to dissolve the *crypt*, the place in the collective conscious of the family that keeps the traumatic memory, and where it lives on and is transmitted in a spectral form.²²⁸ He is at first reluctant to do so, which follows his general attitude of not wanting to discuss matters that are “uncomfortable” (26). He even declares that he is “allergic to confessions,” which certainly creates a contradiction for a writer working on a story that belongs to a genre that is built historically on confessions.²²⁹ Magni’s antipathy towards confessions is caused by being raised with a mentally unstable mother with a drinking problem, who usually fell into confessional mode when drinking. This declaration of not liking confessions, and almost hating them, paradoxically leads Magni to a confessional discussion of his upbringing and childhood. He seems to mourn his childhood and regrets not having been able to help his mother, which echoes Hirsch’s discussion on the responsibility felt by the child of a parent survivor, as she states that works of postmemory are often characterised by the child’s need to make up for the traumatic past of the parent.²³⁰

²²⁸ See Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*.

²²⁹ Autobiography is described as the genre of confessions, and autobiographical works often have the subtitle “confessions”. See for instance the first autobiographical works by Rousseau and St. Augustine that are both titled “Confessions”.

²³⁰ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 34.

This double-sidedness of Magni, his *reluctance* to take on the project of writing about the past, and his conflicting *desire* to write the family history, evokes Caruth's "aporia," which describes how trauma creates the simultaneous need and inability to deal with the traumatic memory. It also shows the archive as *haunting* and how the archived material *haunts* Magni. The lack of stories and information about matters of the past points to how fragmented the intergenerational memory between Magni and his mother is, creating a desire for a place where he can access the silenced memories, for example in the form of the archive. When faced with the memory material from his mother, Magni feels pressed to confront the family's traumatic memory. He also hopes that the archive will bring him what he needs, and answer the many questions he has about his family's past, and that the labour involved in going through the archived material, as well as the writing of the family history, will bring him a therapeutic reward. He therefore desires the archive, as a place that guards the access to the past, only to discover later that the archive is itself haunted: not only by its precarious state but also by its gaps and holes, the repressed memories that are not expressed in the archive, that are silenced and thereby forgotten.

Postmemory and the family archive

The cassette tapes are an example of material that is deliberately created for the archive by Regína who wants to prevent the family history from falling into oblivion. They are kept in the attic, that frames the archive as a marginal space located at a distance from the living space of the everyday. Magni describes at the beginning of the book how it was his wife who wanted to renovate the house completely when the two of them moved in there, to the extent that it does not remind him of his childhood home anymore. The present and the "now" is therefore to be found in the living everyday spaces of the home, while the past, stored in the archived objects, is kept out of reach in storage. The discovery of the cassette tapes motivates Magni to write the story of his family, as he believes that it contains material that gives him access to the past, facilitating the process of gathering the fragmented family memory. He describes how he must do so quickly and before it is too late: a statement that echoes his descriptions of autumn looming, announcing the imminent end and the disappearance of the family memory altogether. But he decides on his writing project before looking through the archive and working through the archived material, which some authors have described as a serious form of labour. Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir discusses this aspect in her book, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing*, where she states: "There is often an effort involved in dealing with the archive;

it is laborious, difficult, and even lonely work.”²³¹ This labour is, among other things, brought about by the randomness or the lack of order in family archives, which differentiate them from official archives that follow strict categorisations, rules and regulations. This means that the person going through the archive has to categorise the archived material himself: “The autobiographer, therefore, has a double function as an archivist and as the researcher who mediates the material.”²³² This applies to Magni, who has to recreate the archive before looking through its material, by transforming its form and media, as his son transfers the recordings to the more modern form of the CD.

Guðmundsdóttir describes the family archive as having a double function: by being on the one hand the last repository that prevents the family history from being forgotten, as well as bearing with it a promise of providing a physical place where the past can be retrieved.²³³ The second point illuminates, according to Guðmundsdóttir, a desire for the archive, expressed in the hope or expectation that it will make up for what has been forgotten.²³⁴ The desire is to a certain extent built on the illusion that the archive will facilitate the writing of one’s life story. That, however, often turns out to not be the case, since family archives tend to be inaccessible in their incompleteness, gaps and cuts. Or as Guðmundsdóttir elucidates: “There is a desire, a longing, for the ‘perfect’ archive in many of these [autobiographical] texts, a belief that documentation will save us from forgetting—which often does not count for how documents can obscure as well as illuminate the past.”²³⁵ This draws the attention to the archivist that created the archive to begin with, and evokes Derrida’s conceptualisation of *archive fever* as a contradictory drive to collect and remember but also to obscure and forget. That contradiction impacts the reception of the archived memories: while bearing with them messages from the past, they do so in abstract and spectral ways, highlighting the ambiguous, obscure and negotiable aspects of memory. The archive can in fact complicate the process of writing a life story, since it calls for the laborious work of not only going through it but also contextualising its material to make it meaningful.

Magni, who decides to take on the responsibility of working through the archive, starts by asking himself how he should approach it, and how he should enter it, since it does not have any clear beginning or end: “The material on the tapes is produced chaotically, as if my mother

²³¹ Guðmundsdóttir, *Representations of Forgetting*, 63.

²³² *Ibid.*, 63.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 63.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

had only thought about collecting and not given any thought to what she intended.”²³⁶ The archivist mother, who collected the material, did not think about the reception of her recordings, echoing the statement above about the archive fever: of preserving yet repressing, therefore emphasising the problematics of responding to the incomprehensible material, in Assmann’s terms the “unstructured” and “disconnected” elements of the stored memory.²³⁷ While the intention of the mother implies that she had younger generations in mind, she did not think through how that generation should approach the material or access it. This suggests the many complexities of *intergenerational* memory and the contradictions involved in the process of transmitting memories between different generations. In other words, the process involved when memories are passed on from parent to child: in the form of random objects, cassette tapes and photos, in boxes scattered around the attic.

Recorded material on tapes is a very special kind of memory object. When Magni finds the cassette tapes, they have as a medium almost become obsolete, which suggests a term coined by Paul Connerton, in his influential article “Seven Types of Forgetting,” or “Forgetting as Planned Obsolescence,” which describes the built-in system of capitalist consumption and how products become out of date, thus implying beforehand upcoming scenes of forgetting.²³⁸ As the cassette tapes are very typical products of capitalist society that is constantly on the lookout for new ways of recording and new media for sound, they are doomed to become extinct, and therefore *also* the material and stories they preserve on them. When Magni finds the cassette tapes he wants to throw them away immediately, since he does not even have a cassette player and therefore cannot access the material. However, it does not take his son, who is more familiar with technology and the products of contemporary capitalist society, a long time not only to access the material but to update it to a more adequate medium for Magni to listen to and work with. The tapes illustrate how memory in contemporary society is often dependent on technology, and how the dynamics of remembrance and forgetting are sometimes based on innovations in design. This highlights the spectral status of memory as vulnerable and precarious, emphasising how remembering and forgetting are often arbitrary and reliant on accidental elements.

²³⁶ “Efnið á spólunum er þannig úr garði gert að ekki er nokkur leið að henda reiður á því, eins og móðir mín hafi aðeins hugsað um að safna en síður leitt hugann að því hvað hún ætlaðist fyrir.” (9).

²³⁷ Assmann, *Erinnerungsraume: Formen un Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedachtnis* (Munich: Beck, 1999), 137. From: Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 35.

²³⁸ Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting”, 66.

The quotation in the introduction to this chapter describes the specific and abstract memory potentials Magni attributes to the recorded sound. He further describes how the disembodied voice is given a life of its own, almost in a posthuman sense, with connotations of spectrality and haunting, since the recording has the potential of delivering messages over a long period of time: from the past and to the present and future, and from people who might be long gone. This makes the cassette tapes important tools of preservation and the recorded sound a memory-technology par excellence. However, even though the recorded voice lives on posthumously, it is not “immortal” and will not outlive the passing of time. Cassette tapes, as material objects, will eventually dissolve and be destroyed, and the equipment needed to access their recordings will without a doubt make them obsolete even earlier. Here silence is equated with oblivion, and silence has indeed often been compared to forgetting: that which is not voiced nor addressed will eventually fall into oblivion.²³⁹

The idea of how the voice “develops a life of its own” further complicates the preservation process of tapes, demonstrating how the voice becomes detached from its original owner, and thus from the story it keeps, disconnected from its original context. While Magni mentions the tapes many times when discussing his project and describing his situation of diving into the past to write the family history, readers never learn what it is exactly that they contain. They never hear any direct quotations from the oral stories, no transcripts or any concrete or precise description of them. Readers are therefore left in the dark as to what kind of memory material they contain: what kind of stories, about what, told by whom and how. Magni only describes them as *incomplete* and *fragmented* and how they leave him somewhat frustrated by not allowing him to get closer to the past and the past lives of family members. The stories seem to be concerned with random anecdotes, and are not concerned with private and personal matters, and most importantly do not express anything related to the family’s repressed secret and trauma. The lack of contact and emotional sharing within the family is expressed in the archived objects of family memory: they do not contain matters of the mind or heart, but describe what Magni terms the “external” reality of the family members. During one scene, for example, readers are given a glimpse of how the archived material is created and rendered mute when Regína, who is at the time overburdened with anxiety and depression, writes a letter to her mother describing her everyday life and stating that everything is all right, when nothing could be further from the truth. This lack of access to the internal reality of the family members

²³⁹ In the introduction to the thesis I mentioned how Jay Winter differentiated between silence and forgetting: the former often entailing a political agency, while the latter is a more neutral term. See: Jay Winter, “Thinking about Silence”, 4.

puts Magni off the project of writing the family history, and from this point on Magni continuously discusses how tempting it is to leave the burden of the family archive, and to write a novel that is based on fictional material altogether. In this sense, the archived material fails him: the recordings are random and incomplete, the photos of the family album mute, and the few letters he finds in the archive are only concerned with business or other mundane matters.

Family pictures: archived photographs

Even though the cassette tapes form the actual family archive in *Fórnarleikar*, the text also contains descriptions and discussion of photographs, and how photographs, as well as other objects of memory, become precious with the passing of time and the passing of family members and loved ones. Photographs of deceased family members are granted an aura and become important, yet complex, images for mourning. The narrative in *Fórnarleikar* describes how pieces of jewellery that Arndís, Magni's grandmother, was supposed to inherit from her mother create a rupture between her and her brothers, when she learns that they have given them to their wives instead of delivering them to her. The pieces of jewellery are not necessarily valuable, but have become important objects due to their memory value and the symbolic relation that they preserve with the deceased relative. One of the pieces is a locket that contains a picture of her grandparents. While these photographs become precious for Arndís, since they are the only concrete link to the memory of her grandparents, they are meaningless to Regína, who receives the locket many years later and does not recognise the people in the photographs (189). The handover of the heirloom takes place when Regína visits her relatives, but during the same scene Magni proudly shows pictures of his family members to the old uncle and aunt, as if showing off his happiness in life. Family photographs become important for two different reasons in this scene. For the old uncle and aunt they form a concrete link to the past, like death masks of deceased ancestors, and are therefore important historical documents for the family memory. For Magni, on the other hand, the photographs that he keeps with him are associated with the present and become important visual testimony to his social status, and his role as a family father.

Hirsch discusses the significance of photography for family life in *Family Frames*. For Hirsch, the family is an “affiliative group” whose relations are constructed through various cultural processes, amongst others photography.²⁴⁰ She writes: “Photography’s social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family. The family photo both displays the

²⁴⁰ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 10.

cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness: it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals.”²⁴¹ On that note, Hirsch describes how the family album is associated with family memory, its history, legends and myths: “As photography immobilizes the flow of family life into a series of snapshots, it perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history.”²⁴² This aspect highlights the function and value of photographs for memory, and how the photographic snapshots in the family album have the potential of turning singular events into meaningful moments. While Hirsch states that the archived photographic image enables subjects to see and touch the past, they also become a screen or space of projection.²⁴³ The archived material, for example the photographs of the family, function for Hirsch as “ ‘points of memory’ that tell us more about our own needs and desires, our own fantasies and fears, than about the past to which they supposedly bear witness.”²⁴⁴

There are two clear examples of this process of “familial look” and projection in relation to photos in *Fórnarleikar*. Sólbjörg, the strict great-grandmother, turns out to be the owner of a rigorously constructed family album, which seems to reflect her character, her desires and fantasies about her own family, rather than the fragmented and secretive family history with its sacrifices and disappointments. When looking through the album, Arndís describes how the images found in the album preserve moments that are unfamiliar to her, for example, a photograph of her husband happily holding and cherishing their daughter, although he had actually been absent during most of Regína’s life (70). Since family photographs are usually taken during happier times in the family and on special occasions such as birthdays and holidays, they tend to give an idealised image of “happy” family life. This is the case for the family album collected and created by Sólbjörg, that does not reflect the disappointments, mourning and melancholia, in the lives of the family members. The ambiguous attitudes towards the family album echo a statement made by Hirsch in *Family Frames*:

photographs locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life. Since looking operates through projection and since the photographic image is the positive development of a negative, the plenitude that constitutes the fulfilment of desire,

²⁴¹ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 7.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 7. Hirsch states in the endnote that she is using the term “ideology” in the Althusserian sense.

²⁴³ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 38.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

photographs can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently, it is not.²⁴⁵

While the photograph preserves what Sólbjörg would consider to be a happy moment in the life of the family, Arndís seems rather to see it as an image that invites her to mourn for the absence of a happy family life by portraying the hope for happiness that never materialised.

This idea of the familial look and projection is also suggested in Regína's reading of a photograph of her father which becomes an important image in the process of mourning his premature death. A scene in *Fórnarleikar* describes how the photograph truly becomes the starting point for the idealisation of the father's memory. Regína owns only one photograph of her father, which is therefore very precious to her. The framed photograph gives Regína the chance to construct her own idea of the father, in other words to negotiate, quite freely, the memory of him. She describes how as a child she would kiss the image goodnight before going to bed, and how she would confess to it. While she could not talk to her mother, who was constantly tired, harsh and strict, her father was always there, looking at her with his kind smile and understanding eyes (104). Regína fears, however, that the photograph, being the only concrete image she has of her father, has actually replaced her own memories of him that are unstable and broken: "The memories of dad were fragmented, reminiscent of flames that went out as soon as they appeared. She tried as much as she could to keep them alive and because she was scared of having distorted them. Hard to distinguish what had happened and what had not."²⁴⁶ It seems that the photograph enables Regína to explore the potential of projection to the fullest and to create a memory of an ideal father/daughter relationship by familiarly *looking*, in Hirsch's terms, at the static snapshot of the father. The photograph of the father highlights the problematic relationship photographs can have with memory and for the process of mourning. Photographs often give a stylised and aestheticised portrait of reality, suggesting how they can invite mourners to create, not only a fixed, but also an idealised image of their deceased loved ones. Regína seems to be aware of this to a certain extent, when she describes how this idea of a static image supports the idea of an illusion:

²⁴⁵ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 8.

²⁴⁶ "Minningarnar um pabba voru brotakenndar, minntu á logandi ljós sem slokknuðu um leið og þau birtust. Hún reyndi eins og hún gat að halda þeim lifandi og einmitt vegna þess var hún hrædd um að hafa afbakað þær. Erfitt var að greina hvað hafði raunverulega gerst og hvað ekki." (43).

The memory of dad was indisputably painful and recollections of him were static, after all this time they had become like pictures carved in stone. Their immobility was not only regrettable, she was a little bit afraid of it. Not impossible that it entailed an illusion such as so many other things. The uncertainty about almost everything was the worst.²⁴⁷

The framed photograph further creates a situation of haunting, which conforms to the presence/absence ontology of the medium, and how scholars have described the referent as a ghost haunting the picture.²⁴⁸ Regína describes how the spectre of the father would return and sit with her in a wicker chair next to her bed while she fell asleep. Once, after a nightmare, when she was older, the father stops returning to her bed. This spectre metaphor can be seen as facilitating or materialising the process of mourning: as a child she is not ready to let go of the memory of the father and needs it for a sense of security and warmth, something she does not get from her mother. The disappearance of the ghost happens when she has reached a certain maturity and at a point when she understands that she must let go of her father's ghost. The photograph of Regína's father and Sólbjörg's family album highlight the illusiveness of photographs and how unstable they are as objects and mediums of memory. In both cases, the photographs are rendered mute, allowing their negotiable aspect to come forward, providing both Regína and Sólbjörg with spaces for projecting their own desires about memory and past. These scenes further stress how the archived photographs from the family album do not function as memory aids for Magni, nor help him in his task of researching into the past and writing the family history. While they give him an image of the "outer" reality of the family in the past, he will have to use other methods for looking beyond or underneath the photographic surface, and in order to unravel the hidden secrets and private matters of the family members.

Fórnarleikar: *the impossibility of writing a life story*

At one point Magni tells his wife that he has dropped the project of writing the story of the family, and that he has changed it into a novel by changing the names of the characters: "I didn't know enough about what had really happened within the family, even though I had been told a

²⁴⁷ "Minningin um pabba var óneitanlega sársaukafull og endurminningar honum tengdar komnar í fastar skorður, eftir allan þennan tíma, að þær voru orðnar eins og myndir sem höfðu verið meitlaðar í stein. Óhagganleikinn var ekki aðeins dapurlegur, hún var svoltíð hrædd við hann. Ekki útilokað að hann bæri í sér blekkingu líkt og margt annað. Óvissan um nær allt var það versta." (93).

²⁴⁸ This is the theme of *Camera Lucida* by Barthes, who influences other academics such as Hirsch, who refers to Derrida's *Work of Mourning* when stating: "The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and dead other." *Family Frames*, 5.

lot of stories. For me, external events did not matter the most but that which could not be pinned down.”²⁴⁹ He further reflects on the differences between fiction and life writing, and how one must undergo a strict yet creative process of creating and recreating the material of the family archive in order to be able to construct a coherent and a readable story out of its material (11). What seems to be bothering him the most with turning the memory material into a novel is how the latter is first and foremost structured around a distinct aim or a goal that is not present in life, which is arbitrary and non-linear. The result he comes up with is a form that cannot really negotiate fiction and reality: either one can write biographies about the external reality of living people, or create and write about the internal reality of fictional people. In both cases the writing is based on a pact between author and reader. In life writing the author promises the reader to base the story as much as possible on real events, on what really happened, while in the novel the author sets out to deceive the reader, and the reader acknowledges that and actually desires to be deceived (200).²⁵⁰

Drawing on theories on postmemory, in Hirsch’s terms, Magni resorts to imaginative ways to engage with the family memory, due to his lack of access to the parents’ past. In that way he engages with what Caruth terms the traumatic aporia of wanting yet being unable to deal with the family trauma by narrativising it into a story. The family archive frames Magni’s contradictions and his need, yet inability, to work through and unravel the family trauma. This contradiction brings out the spectrality of his situation and the spectral state of the archived material. These are spectral memories that haunt Magni in more than one sense. Firstly, he is haunted by the family memory, especially the trauma in the family memory. Secondly, the archived material is haunted by its own precarious state and will soon be left to silence. Finally, the archive as such is haunted by what is left out of it, its gaps and holes, the secrets and traumas that are not voiced on the tapes, pictured in the photos, nor expressed by the letters.

While readers can contemplate the many meta-fictional comments and statements made by Magni, they have in hand a narrative, fictional or not, and the family history of very believable characters, and about the interactions between generations. *Fórnarleikar* therefore presents an attempt at a family history that uses the family archive to address the trauma and unravel the hidden secrets and repressed memories of the past, to set a good example for the

²⁴⁹ “Að auki vissi ég ekki nógu mikið um það sem í raun og veru hafði gerst innan fjölskyldunnar, þó að mér hefðu verið sagðar ótal sögur. Ytri atburðir voru ekki í mínum huga það sem mestu máli skipti, heldur það sem ekki varð á hönd fest.” (198).

²⁵⁰ This strongly echoes Philippe Lejeune’s theory of the autobiographical pact between author and reader: *Le Pacte Autobiographique*. Poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

future. And the story ends on this note, when Magni has finished the story he was working on and learns that his daughter-in-law is expecting a baby: “I was going to tell them about my story, that it is finished. That must wait a better time. It bears with it the seed of a different kind of life.”²⁵¹ The same can be said about the family archive, that comes from the past and bears with it potential for the future. It provides the possibility for the coming generations to bring to light something that has been forgotten. In the context of *Fórnarleikar*, it suggests how Magni’s children, who will inherit his house and along with it the family history represented in the archive in the attic, can decide to take on the laborious work of going through the archived material, to reconnect to old memory objects of the past, or become overburdened with their spectral state, influencing them to take up the possibility of *negotiating* memory. That is, approach the archived memory material as an inspiration for an artistic project, a novel or a piece of art.

Spectral memories of the childhood archive in Elín, ýmislegt

Elín, ýmislegt is a novel about a woman named Elín who sets out to write the story of her life. She seems to feel compelled to give a formal account of her life when the past knocks on her door in the form of three cardboard boxes containing material from her childhood. Elín is a loner; she lives on her own in a house she renovated herself, and does not have family nor any close friends. She studied sculpture in Copenhagen and works as props master in theatre and film, but she explains how it was her late grandmother who introduced her to such work, and who herself made wigs for the theatre. Elín did not know her parents: she writes how her mother died when she was a child and how she has never known who her father was. Along with telling her own story, Elín also writes about Ellen, a young genius and a playwright. Their lives are interconnected in different ways, one being that Elín used to know Ellen’s late father, a famous author. The narrative therefore presents two stories with two protagonists, and chapters that focus on the life of each character. Elín is nevertheless presented as being the main storyteller of the narrative as well as its focal point, by being the person who mediates the story-world to the reader. As the narrative progresses, Elín seems slowly to be losing her grip on life as well as of the narrative, due to an unidentified disease. This raises questions of whether the disease might be the true reason for writing her life story, which would explain the urgency in preserving her own legacy in written form before it is too late.

²⁵¹ “Ég hafði ætlað að segja þeim frá sögunni minni, að henni sé lokið. Það verður að bíða betri tíma. Hún ber í sér frjókorn annarskonar lífs.” (216).

The archive, in the form of the three cardboard boxes, plays a vital role in the narrative focusing on Elín. In the beginning, it appears as a plot device that drives the story forward by presenting the archive as possibly containing the solution to a *mystery*. Or, rather an object embodying what Elín terms the “injustice” of her life: a miniature glass horse that proves to be a traumatic item as it relates to an assault experienced by Elín during her teenage years. It is clear from the beginning that the glass horse entails something terrible: she is agitated when she discovers it in the first place, describes how she shivers with cold sweat, and how she must instantly remove the horse from her precious home. She feels compelled to destroy the horse, which seems to be the only way to destroy the memory it carries. This reaction of Elín to the miniature glass horse reflects how archived material can function as *dynamic* memory objects, since it allows her to recollect a repressed traumatic memory. It also suggests how the archive becomes a substitute for her own personal childhood memory by replacing the memories that she has intentionally repressed and tried to forget. The repression seems to be a way to prevent the memories from becoming a constitutive part of her identity, allowing her the freedom to create her own individuality. The focal point of the following analysis is to examine the mnemonic function of the three cardboard boxes: how they introduce spectral memories to the narrative and memory objects that *haunt* the protagonist, calling for an active reaction on her behalf to resolve unsettled matters of the past.

“Enigmatic time-capsules” and archive fiction

The captions of the boxes: “Elín, Papers”, “Elín, Books” and “Elín, Misc.”, give an idea of their content and indicate their status as a form of family archive.²⁵² Or rather, a collection of Elín’s old belongings, arranged and organised by the grandmother who has kept them in her house all these years. Family archives can be collections of photographs, such as photo albums, as well as assemblages of heirlooms, scrapbooks, recipes and other everyday objects. In other words, family archives seem to consist of diverse *possessions* that in the context of the family are deemed valuable, because they give a sense of family identity, heritage, legacy and tradition. In the case of Elín, the boxes contain various memory objects that are personal to her, suggesting a type of personal childhood archive, rather than objects that are transmitted between different generations within the family, as is often the case with family archives. The childhood archive, however, reflects memories in the context of the *family* and from a time when Elín

²⁵² The last caption “Elín, Misc.” is actually the original title of the book in Icelandic, *Elín, ýmislegt*, which emphasises the importance of the boxes for the narrative.

lived with her grandmother. Or as she describes it: “All the worldly belongings I’d left behind in my bedroom all those years ago.”²⁵³ (7) While the term postmemory is clearly appropriate when describing the memory material in *Fórnarleikar* – the cassette tapes Magni inherits from his mother – since it represents a form of intergenerational memory, Elín’s relationship to her childhood archive is different. Although it was the grandmother who arranged and organised the boxes, they contain objects that were originally in Elín’s possession and therefore related to her identity from a different time, which highlights their connection to her personal memory. However, as they are collected by the grandmother, they come into being in the context of the family as well as presenting Elín’s childhood memory under the influence of an older generation, suggesting ties to the intergenerational memory dynamics of postmemory. They further make Elín think of her mother and grandmother, and how the three of them are connected, suggesting how the boxes are a collection that commemorates more than one generation, and therefore possibly holding the key to the story of their communal past. She contemplates whether they might contain a jumper knitted by her mother, and fragments of her blood, since she used to knit firmly, stretching the yarn tautly around her fingers. The boxes therefore might contain the mother’s DNA, “her one-of-a-kind composition” (43) as Elín refers to it, suggesting how material, life and memories come together in the form of the archive. Elín further admits how the memory of the jumper comes from a photograph which is the only image she has of her mother. This reflects how she herself does not keep any memories from this time or about the mother, suggesting how the archive replaces this part of her personal internal memory.

As in the case of the previous novel, *Fórnarleikar*, the location of the boxes in *Elín, ýmislegt* illustrates how the family archive is usually stored in marginal spaces of the home, in the basement or attic, far away from the clamour and clutter of the everyday. Elín describes how a real estate agent who sold her grandmother’s house, where she grew up and lived as a child, finds three cardboard boxes with her name on them, in a storage space no one seems to have known about, that was not visible in any architectural drawings of the apartment. This shows how the archived material is placed in a “spectral” location and how the active “public” memory is to be found within the spaces of the everyday, while the passive “hidden” memory is kept *out-of-sight* in the home’s marginal spaces and in a “ghost” room – the hidden room which is a recurrent motif from classical ghost stories. Boxes in the attic are a classical form

²⁵³ Kristín Eiríksdóttir, *A Fist or a Heart*, trans. Larissa Kyzer, 7. From here on I will refer to the novel in the main text with page number in brackets.

for a family archive and highlight its “precarious state” and how it is stored away in quite accidental and nonchalant manner. Elín’s boxes, for example, seem to come from a grocery shop, which implies how in their previous life they stored food and other daily products: “*Ora canned green beans, Johnson’s baby powder. Packets of just-add-water soup mix.*” (43) This highlights the mundane aspect of the family archive, as well as underlining how it does not necessarily contain anything valuable, but objects that have been deemed precious by a family member packing them. Unlike the institutional archive that usually stores objects in ideal conditions of preservation and where temperature, humidity, light and such are regulated, the objects of the family archive are kept in casual cardboard boxes exposed to all kinds of hazards and risks, such as water damage and fire. The family archive is therefore extremely vulnerable, as well as *haunted* by its precarious state and its potential annihilation, stressing how both Magni and Elín need to go through its material right away, before it is too late. This makes the family archive spectral as well as framing its material as *spectral memories*. However, the boxes are also spectral in a different way. Even unopened, they serve as mnemonic triggers: the discovery of the boxes seems single-handedly to prompt a recollection of the past, as Elín starts to think back before looking through the boxes, contemplating whether they contain this or that object, related to this or that event in the past. These boxes are *haunting* since they “disturb” Elín in her peace, encouraging her to think back and ask questions that are difficult to answer.

As already mentioned, Guðmundsdóttir describes “the desire for archive” as a tendency in autobiographies, where authors hope that the documents of the archive will facilitate the life writing and make up for what has been forgotten.²⁵⁴ Elín does not have this desire, since she is rather annoyed by the discovery of the boxes, and describes them as an intrusion into her life, forcing her to go through them and therefore to recollect something that she seems to have avoided thinking about for a long time. At first she seeks to rid herself of the archive and at one point she even drives the boxes to a recycling centre (19). However, once she has arrived at the centre, a memory of a small diary her grandmother gave her comes to mind, and she wonders if it is to be found in the boxes (20). Elín seems to be aware that the archive contains documents related to memories that she wants to allow to be forgotten, which goes hand in hand with what Guðmundsdóttir describes as sometimes being the case with family archives: “The archive can contain documents of what should have remained silenced or forgotten, and sometimes archival work involves piecing together unpleasant memories and histories.”²⁵⁵ Elín seems to prefer not

²⁵⁴ Guðmundsdóttir, *Representations of Forgetting*, 59.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

to activate the passive memories of the archive: at one point she refers to the cardboard boxes as “mysterious time capsules” which she has nothing to do with (19). This attitude might be related to the “injustice” she refers to and speaks of when she describes the reason for writing her life story: “The reason I decided to write this is that if I don’t, no one will – a predictable outcome. The injustice of the story is, nevertheless, a matter of no importance; there’s injustice because injustice is everywhere. Intrinsic to our stories because it’s intrinsic to us.” (2) The notion of injustice suggests that Elín prepares herself, if hesitantly, to face the past and work through unsettled matters.

Elín’s reluctance to open the boxes, as well as her discussion of injustice, reflect how she is dealing with trauma. As in the case of Magni in *Fórnarleikar*, the trauma in Elín’s life creates a paradox in the simultaneous need, yet inability, to address it. It arouses the curiosity of the reader, implying how the key to the mystery, or rather to the repressed traumatic memory about the injustice, is to be found within the archive. This relates to Max Saunders’ idea of *archive fiction*, where the archive becomes a narrative device and an important influence for plots and storylines.²⁵⁶ Saunders describes the archive as a tendency in fiction focusing on secrets that are gradually revealed: “According to this view of the archive, it is a repository of secret knowledge. We only have to find the source, the document, the object, and we will know the secret, solve the murder, crack the code.”²⁵⁷ Saunders mentions the international bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* as a type of archive fiction which suggests how narratives use the form of the archive to deal with mysteries from the past: “If we are baffled or confused by a question, the mystery is in our minds, the solution is in the archive.”²⁵⁸ Driving the boxes back home from the recycling centre is thus an important decision for Elín: a determination to “crack the code” in terms of facing the past and looking into the repressed memory. Or at least to have the possibility of doing so by allowing the boxes to stay and to keep haunting her.

Saunders emphasises how archive fiction engages with discourses of trauma “and offer[s] a fantasy that every traumatic memory can be retrieved and preserved; the repressed can be made to return, not as terror or tragedy but as incontrovertible historical evidence.”²⁵⁹ Thus the archive presents the potential of a *spectral return* of the repressed trauma. This becomes evident in *Elín, ýmislegt*, and I would argue that the narrative plays with precisely this idea, where a miniature glass horse becomes representative of a traumatic memory and a crucial

²⁵⁶ Max Saunders, “Archive Fiction” in *Comparative Critical Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2-3, 10/2011, 169-188, 169.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

item when disentangling a repressed secret. In Saunders's terms, the archive becomes a metaphor for individual memory and an instrument for unfolding the individual's relationship to the past: "the secret hidden in the archive is the secret of the past, of our relation to time. It is a figure for memory, and especially for the relation between individual memory and social or cultural memory."²⁶⁰ The boxes become a metaphor for Elín's memory that she has repressed and keeps in a passive state in storage, as well as reflecting the aforementioned intergenerational memory dynamic: how the boxes do not only commemorate her childhood, but also the communal past of the female side of her family and her life with her grandmother and mother.

Unlike the writer Magni in *Fórnarleikar*, who does not present the archived material directly to readers, Elín describes, gradually and as the narrative progresses, the process of unpacking the boxes and handling the forgotten memory objects. Elín views every object in the box as a testimony to her former life when she states that: "a speck of my soul must reside in each of these things." (127) The discovery of the archive presents the *return* of the repressed memory which gives the boxes and their content a *spectral* aura. This is perhaps most evident in the case of the glass horse that represents a repressed trauma that returns to haunt the protagonist and insists "something-to-be-done" in the fashion of spectrality emphasising a *response* to the haunting of spectres.²⁶¹ One of the responses to the haunting might be to give an account of her life. Saunders describes how the archive as a figure of memory is related to the writing of stories as "an allegory for what the writer does: piecing together stories and dramas out of glimpses of lives in texts or images, in order to discover a human secret."²⁶² This last point even echoes Elín's statement about her own story as "there is no story. Just an attempt to connect signs that were conveyed in waking life and in dreams." (3) This statement expresses Elín's reaction to the archive: how the memory objects from the cardboard boxes appear as "symbols," inviting her not only to read into the past, but also to connect the dots and construct a coherent narrative of her life-story.

Archived material: spectral memories

The boxes contain two different kinds of memory objects: static and dynamic. The *static* memory objects are passive in their relationship to the past: apart from coming from the past and giving ideas on the "external reality" of Elín's childhood, they do not reveal anything

²⁶⁰ Saunders, "Archive Fiction" 173.

²⁶¹ Avery Gordon states: "Haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done." *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xvi.

²⁶² Saunders, "Archive Fiction", 173.

beyond the outer image. These are typical archived objects such as books and photographs that, as in the case of Magni in *Fórnarleikar*, do not communicate anything about the private lives of the older generations. These passive memory objects create a striking contrast to two other items from the archive that prove to be *dynamic* memory objects: allowing Elín to recollect repressed memories and giving her the chance to open the door to the otherwise locked-away past. The box labelled “Elín, Books” contains the books of her childhood, such as a collection of national legends, a bible she inherited from her mother, and the novels *Salka Valka* and *Anna Karenina*. The mentioning of these titles locates Elín in a specific time-space, as they provide information about the environment she was brought up in and the identity of her family. This reflects the aforementioned classical function of the family archive as bearing witness to the heritage, legacy and tradition of the family. The bible implies that she is brought up in a Christian environment, which does not necessarily have any religious connotations but suggests a Western cultural context. The collection of national legends is considered important for Icelandic heritage and cultural memory, associating Elín with a larger cultural group. *Salka Valka* is a canonical piece of Icelandic literature, a novel by Halldór Laxness. *Anna Karenina* on the other hand connects Elín to the canon of world literature and awards her a cultural capital and suggests that Elín was intellectual at a young age. This collection of canonical literature suggests yet more play with the idea of the archive and highlights it as an authoritative tool, reflecting how cultural objects need to be deemed valuable to gain their place in the archive, and to be transformed into cultural memories. It draws attention to Elín’s grandmother, who created the archive to begin with when she packed Elín’s belongings into the three cardboard boxes. The grandmother acquires the role of an authority when constructing the memory collection for her granddaughter, directing how she will remember her childhood and their communal past.

When considering the photographs in the archive, the grandmother, and her role as a memory authority agent, comes back into the reader’s mind. Elín describes how the boxes contain three photographs that all have ties to the grandmother. The first image is Elín’s confirmation photograph. While people usually dread looking at these portraits of themselves taken during a vulnerable time in their lives, they are often prominently displayed by grandmothers. The two other photographs are taken from a photo album that has probably been thrown away. Their context is therefore lost but their preservation implies how these photographs have been deemed important by the grandmother: “As if Grandma had known the album would be taken to the dump, as if she wanted to save these precise photographs.” (175)

The first one shows Elín's grandparents in their garden on a sunny day, in summery clothes and smiling. It goes against what Elín's grandmother used to tell her about her grandfather: even though she loved him very much, and claims that she was happy being married to him, he seems to have been a rather poor husband, who had a drinking problem and had affairs with other women. The photograph, so carefully chosen by the grandmother to be preserved in the boxes, therefore rather reflects how she *wants* to remember her marriage, as well as how she wants it to be *remembered* by Elín, rather than portraying an accurate image of a past reality. The other photograph shows Elín's mother sitting on a bed. She is pregnant and holds a small hand-knitted jumper, the one Elín wonders about when thinking about the possible content of the boxes. Elín can easily identify the subjects in both photographs because she remembers her grandmother, who has probably told her who the two other subjects are. The photograph of the mother does not, however, tell her anything more about her. Elín states that her mother's look implies that she wants to tell her something but she does not know what exactly: "What is she thinking about?" (176) Elín wishes that her mother were able to tell her something about herself which reflects how little she truly knows about her mother. As with the books in the boxes, the photos give an image of Elín's external reality in her childhood. They draw attention to the grandmother who constructed the archive, and how she obviously wanted Elín to remember her past and her childhood in a specific way, as the photos testify to traditions and ideals of Western culture: the confirmation photo implies that Elín had a good Christian upbringing; the photo of her grandparents is supposed to testify that she experienced a happy family life in her childhood; and the photo of her mother proves her existence. However, these archived documents are static in their representation of the past, as they do not allow Elín to move beyond the external image they portray, not telling her anything about the hidden secrets of the family.

Even though the boxes are mainly filled with "static" memory objects of this sort, they also contain two objects that prove to be dynamic in their relationship to the past. The miniature glass horse is, for example, an archived memory that activates Elín's recollection, allowing her not only to recall the traumatic memory but also providing her with the possibility of reacting to the trauma. It is not at all clear whether the miniature glass horse comes from the boxes or not, and it is very doubtful, to say the least, whether the grandmother has carefully preserved this traumatic item by packing it in the boxes along with Elín's other possessions. Yet it appears in Elín's apartment when the boxes have been moved in there. As a teenager, she was raped by her best friend's brother, who left a miniature glass horse in her vagina causing an infection that led to hospitalisation and permanent injury to her womb. She and her best friend had been

drinking alcohol for the first time, and partied with the brother and his friends at her friend's home. Elín passes out and wakes up the next day without her underpants. A few days later she passes out in her room and wakes up in the hospital. Before revealing the story of the horse, she wonders how she can be rid of it, but to destroy the horse seems easier said than done: "Nothing seemed entirely satisfactory. Chucking it into the toilet could mean it getting lodged somewhere in the pipes, which was a chilling prospect. Flinging it into the sea could mean it getting tangled in seaweed and from then on out, always being there, just offshore." (63) This implies that even though the glass horse would be removed from her house it would continue to exist, and the same goes for the traumatic memory it keeps. She finally decides to bring the horse back to the man who raped her, the brother of her now late friend. She quietly breaks into his home, leaves the miniature glass horse in a chest of drawers in the entrance, and therefore "returns the shame" to where it belongs. From this moment on, the horse will stop haunting her, and haunt her rapist and his family instead. Thus instead of trying to destroy it, Elín decides to relocate it, leaving it in a very specific place which would therefore become haunted by its memory and highlighting the strong relationship between memory and location, haunting and space.

The glass horse that preserves the memory of the rape is, however, not the only dynamic memory object related to Elín's childhood archive. The horse seems to represent a trauma that can be dealt with in a straightforward manner, and a haunting that asks directly for *something that needs to be done*. The other type of trauma, to be found within the narrative in *Elín, ýmislegt*, seems to be more infused in all the objects in the archive, and is expressed directly in a diary that Elín kept as a teenager, when her grandmother started suffering from dementia. It seems that the memory of the grandmother bears with it something painful, perhaps reminding Elín of the shock and devastation that followed her becoming ill. By reading the diary, Elín can recall the moments when her grandmother was slowly losing her grip on reality and disappearing into oblivion. It expresses her own thoughts from the time, which she refers to directly, allowing readers to catch a glimpse of her younger self. She describes the state the grandmother was in at the time, and how she does not want to leave the grandmother by herself when she goes to school (126). The diary expresses the traumatic memory by describing how Elín slowly loses her only family member and support in life. It also expresses a deep fear that the same will happen to her: that she will lose her memory and hence lose her grip on her own self and her own reality: "Somehow, I'd always imagined that I'd go like Grandma. [...] The prospect had terrified me ever since I said goodbye to her. The thought terrified me so much that I never finished it. It travelled along with me unthought, shaped me, found a channel

through me. The fear of losing my mind.” (132) The fear or threat of ending up like the grandmother follows her subconsciously throughout her life, indicating for readers the course the narrative might take. It also implies how Elín has not allowed herself to mourn her grandmother, only repressed her memory, suggesting the creation of a *crypt*, in Abraham and Torok’s terms, that keeps the memory in a spectral form.

Elín, for example, threw everything away when her grandmother died, all her belongings, instead of going through the process of carefully selecting several objects to form a family archive and preserve the memory of the grandmother: “Everything had to go to the dump. Everything reminded me of disease and despair. Even those objects saturated with memories of better times became depressing in this context – so depressing that they had to go to the dump.” (13) The act of throwing away the grandmother’s belongings is in line with Paul Connerton’s term *repressive erasure* which shares strong similarities with Assmann’s *intentional forgetting*.²⁶³ Repressive erasure necessitates an agency, an act of subjects where memory objects are destroyed with the “explicit purpose of casting all memory of them into oblivion.”²⁶⁴ The removal of the memory objects related to the grandmother reflects how Elín seeks to erase her memory, suggesting a form of a melancholic repression instead of a more “natural” type of mourning. The storyline of the glass horse reflects a discussion on the connection between material objects and insubstantial memories: whether the former can either preserve, keep or even destroy the latter:

Did I dare, generally speaking, to break the horse? I knew very well that there was nothing to fear. Of course nothing would happen if the glass broke. And yet I suspected that the physical material itself had certain archival properties. [...] Maybe it would be best to preserve the horse in its unaltered state, to hide it, to forget it. Could it then reappear somewhere else later? (64)

This raises questions of what happens to the memories when the objects they are related to are relocated, or even transformed and take on new forms. In this sense, there is no “intentional forgetting” in terms of trashing and destroying: materials simply take on new forms in new places, either by being recycled, and used to create new objects, or ending up in landfills in marginal spaces. Materials can never be made to evaporate completely, they can only be altered,

²⁶³ Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting”, 60.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

illustrating how the memories they preserve live on in spectral forms. The discovery of the family archive, or rather the cardboard boxes packed by the grandmother, containing Elín's childhood belongings, allow the return of memory objects that haunt the protagonist. These are objects that disturb Elín in her peace, urging her to think back and recollect repressed memories that she has actively sought to forget. While the books and photographs in the boxes give an external image of her childhood, two objects allow her to recover traumatic memories, as well as urging her to react to them and resolve them. As a material memory object, the miniature glass horse gives Elín the chance to relocate the traumatic memory and change its course of haunting. The diary, however, expresses a trauma that proves to be more difficult to deal with, implying how it might be the main catalyst for Elín's attempt to write her story, as a way of working against the repression that has governed her adult life, as well as the forgetting that might soon take over her existence.

Elín, ýmislegt: a novel on forgetting?

The repressive status of Elín's childhood belongings at the beginning of the story, and her reluctance to open the boxes in order to face the past, seems to be a way for Elín not to allow the past to become the main source forming her identity. This evokes Paul Connerton's notion of "forgetting which is constitutive in the formation of a new identity."²⁶⁵ Connerton suggests how forgetting does not necessarily have to be conceptualised as being a *loss*, but can be experienced as *gain*: "Forgetting then becomes part of the process by which newly shared memories are constructed because a new set of memories are frequently accompanied by a set of tacitly shared silences."²⁶⁶ The painful memories related to the grandmother are therefore kept in a passive state in the shadowy storage space of the archive which is in line with Connerton's statement: "Not to forget might [...] provoke too much cognitive dissonance: better to consign some things to a shadow world."²⁶⁷ Connerton emphasises how forgetting makes space for the creation of new memories: "What is allowed to be forgotten provides living space for present projects."²⁶⁸ This means that the present, and the acts of the present, are allowed to be the foundation which supports the identity, rather than the past, genealogy or family tradition and legacy.

²⁶⁵ Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting", 62.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

Guðmundsdóttir describes how the reason behind archival work is often a search for oneself, as a way to paint a fuller picture of origins and family traits and to find explanations for the present state of being.²⁶⁹ At the beginning of the narrative, and before she decides to face the past and open the boxes, Elín rejects the archive because she does not want it to reflect her “present being,” nor to become a dominant influence on her self-image. Instead, she describes thoroughly how she renovated her house, how proud she is of that process, to the point that the house becomes a foundational symbol in explaining her identity as a self-made woman. She buys the house when she moves back home from her sculpture studies in Copenhagen: a hundred-year-old sheep shed which has been transformed into an apartment and lived in by different families (17). She re-mortgages her grandmother’s house and renovates the sheep-shed-turned-house completely: “[I] took my time renovating the foundation – exterminating, lifting, rebuilding, putting in a sewage pipe, learning all about dampness and ventilation. Adjusted the conditions, changed materials. Rebuilt.” (15) By changing the material of the house, its form and structure, Elín seeks not only to take over the house as a dwelling space for her to move to in the present, but also to take control of the story of the house, its memory and past. Owning a house or a specific space made out of specific material becomes an existential question for Elín: “[I] understood how important it is to be one with physical material, with the stuff things are made of, to become part of it.” (67) The house becomes a concrete image of her identity as a self-made person, a woman who as a child lived without parents, but who was taught by her grandmother to take life into her own hands and reinvent herself: “I had practically rebuilt the whole house all by myself, and I still remember that feeling. The pride. It was my house. My fingerprints were everywhere – inside the pipes, the drain, on the back of the wood panels.” (67) The house becomes a literal *lieu de mémoire*: a place that is not only important for her personal memory but also draws attention to how she constructs her own memory and identity. The house as a *lieu de mémoire* or a memory object shares similarities with the archive, highlighting how Elín, by reconstructing the house, constructs a memory for the future, as a legacy that will last when she will die.

As a living space, home becomes a symbol for *how* subjects live, for their being and existence. It is therefore strongly related to the identity of its inhabitants, and even becomes a symbol for the self, or a structure for the self-image. In this sense, the different parts of the

²⁶⁹ “Looking for oneself is a familiar endeavour in the archival work, a search for understanding, an attempt to paint a fuller picture of origins and family traits. [...] Autobiographical searches in the family archive can turn up exactly this kind of evidence; the writers find explanations for their own being.” Guðmundsdóttir, *Representations of Forgetting*, 64.

house symbolise different elements of the self: while the exterior of the house refers to how the subject presents herself publicly, the interior represents the inner mind, the personal memory, where the unconscious, desires and fears are hidden in the marginal spaces, such as the basement or attic. This last point suggests the classical theme of the haunted house, which can indicate how it is in fact the inhabitant's self that is *haunted*. In the context of *Elín, ýmislegt*, the detailed renovations of the house point to how the protagonist seeks to rid herself of all ghosts: of spectres that have settled in the house and are related to former inhabitants, as well as Elín's own ghosts from the past that are related to her repressed personal secrets. However, the arrival of the cardboard boxes introduces a spectral presence within her precious home, suggesting how the house has become *haunted* by the manifestation of memory objects that haunt its inhabitant. This also explains why the appearance of the glass horse within the house becomes so critical and agonising and why its removal is so important. The glass horse signifies a foreign intrusion into the sanctuary of private life, personal memory and self, just as it was forced into her body as a teenager. The glass horse implies that Elín's house is haunted, and thus also her personal memory and identity, stressing that something needs to be done. In this sense, the emphasis on forgetting at the beginning of the novel, as well as Elín's reluctance to accept the existence of the archive and to go through its material, prepares the narrative of memory and recollection, stressing the tight connection and constant dynamic between remembering and forgetting, and how the one cannot exist without the other.

Elín's story is thus a story about forgetting, but in a double sense. On the one hand, it highlights how forgetting is used as a way to direct memory in the present and to allow only certain memories to become symbolic or foundational for identity. Elín seems to be an archetype for Connerton's theory on how forgetting creates space for new memories in order to establish a new identity. This can be considered as the positive side of forgetting: allowing subjects an agency to decide which parts of the past they want to focus on and remember, as well as exploring other methods, when creating identities, than the past, heritage and family legacy. Forgetting, however, also creates a different and a more tragic tone for the narrative, where forgetting symbolises the ultimate end, death and silence. The story of the grandmother's illness, as well as other elements in the story, suggest how oblivion might be Elín's own impending destiny. In the final chapter, Elín has lost her grip on reality, as well as on the narrative, that gradually dissolves and becomes fragmented.

Elín's course towards oblivion is supported by an on-going discussion on forgetting in the narrative, which not only draws attention to the dynamic relationship between memory and

forgetting, but also complicates the concept of forgetting, by showing its constructive as well as destructive sides. Here, Assmann's distinction between the active and passive sides of forgetting comes to mind. When brought to the domain of the individual, active forgetting describes when the subject actively forgets something for some reason. The passive side, however, is, in this context of the individual personal memory, involuntary, where forgetting deprives subjects of their agency and independence. At one point in the story, Elín recollects how her grandmother valued the constructive side of forgetting, but it seems as if the grandmother is well aware of the possibility of *selective memory*: how one can choose to remember some events and forget others, hence her influence over Elín's childhood archive. The memory of the grandfather, her husband, conforms to that, and at one point she states: "that's what we humans are always striving for – to forget ourselves and to let ourselves be forgotten. [...] It is so dreadfully painful to be human, explained Grandma, and sometimes, the only way to bear it is to forget." (107) This statement by the grandmother suggests how forgetting is a way to overcome painful experiences: to decide to forget the sorrowful incident and to continue living towards the future. However, forgetting in *Elín, ýmislegt* also has its destructive sides. At one point in the story Elín hears on the radio about the disappearance of an unidentified man, which opens up for a discussion on depression and how Elín herself has often thought about making herself disappear. At that point she states: "Still, the most common, most unostentatious disappearances take place within a person. When the personality takes over the work of the soul and continuous onward, fully mechanised, with the help of the body." (114) Here Elín refers to the disappearance of memory and dementia which are common in old age. This kind of disappearance is, according to Elín, a *privilege* to those who have family members and loved ones who can take care of them: "To lose your wits, fall apart, have a nervous breakdown – these are the privileges of those who have loved ones." (125) This highlights how people lose their independence and agency when memory fails them and become entirely dependent on the goodwill of others or the workings of the institutionalised health care system.

To die and be remembered or forgotten frames a gender-tension in the novel. Elín's grandmother describes how the women of the family are not remembered for their everyday heroism of surviving, taking care of the home, bringing up children, and doing their jobs, but are usually forgotten after their death. Or as she states: "Women in our family, Grandma sometimes said, they might glide by sight unseen, but they make it all the same." (108) This is in opposition to the memory of Ellen's father, the other protagonist of the story, who after his death becomes an institutionalised legend. Elín tells her readers about Ellen, a young

playwright, who suffers from social phobia and from being raised by a mentally ill mother. The two of them are brought together when the local theatre decides to perform Ellen's play and for which Elín works as the props master. However, it is also Ellen's father, the famous author Álfur Finnsson, who connects the two characters, as Elín used to know him. The memory of the father author has been transformed into a cultural memory: not only have his works of literature been deemed important for the canon of literature, but his house has also been turned into a museum (37). The memory of the father is therefore part of the canon, in Aleida Assmann's terms, meaning that institutions are left with the responsibility of keeping his memory alive. Elín describes how his descendants make sure of that, by erecting a memorial in his name in a specific location, founding the home-museum, as well as writing his public obituary in a particular way – leaving Ellen, his illegitimate child and her mother, the father's younger lover, out of the memorial text. In that sense, Ellen and her mother can be seen as spectres haunting the legacy of the dead father-author. While Álfur Finnsson has been transformed into a *lieu de mémoire* or an official cultural memory site, and while his oeuvre seems to become fixed and a static-like legacy, nothing but oblivion, void and silence seems to be awaiting Elín by the end of *Elín, ýmislegt*.

Conclusion: spectral memories from the family archive

The two novels, *Fórnarleikar* by Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir, and *Elín, ýmislegt* by Kristín Eiríksdóttir, are examples of *archive fictions*: where the archive becomes a plot device that drives the story forward as well as being a central theme of the novels. For the writer Magni the archive turns out to be a puzzle he cannot solve, highlighting his limited access to the past as well as how obscure archived documents can turn out to be. Even though at the beginning of the novel he states that he will use the archived documents to write the family history, and therefore implies that the reader will follow that process in a meta-fictional way, the narrative that follows does not really deal with that procedure. Instead Magni wonders about the past, trying to understand why his relationship to it is complicated. Magni does not unpack the archive for the reader: he never refers directly to the archived material by, for example, quoting an interview taken by the mother or an oral story recounted by an old relative. In this sense, the archived material *fails* at being an inspiration for a story, leaving Magni to look for other ways to deal with the past when writing his novel. Magni's archive of cassette tapes is clearly an example of postmemory, highlighting the complexities of intergenerational transmission of memories and when family archives are silently inherited from one generation to the other.

Elín, ýmislegt seems to be a more classical form of archive fiction: where the secret of the past is to be found within the archive. Or, rather, the key opening the repressed traumatic memory. It even represents the fantasy Max Saunders writes of, about the retrievable traumatic memory that does not return as an imminent threat, but as unquestionable evidence of an injustice that needs to be rectified. Here the archive is not a puzzle that cannot be solved, but rather a mystery that the protagonist needs to unravel in her own time. The unpacking of the archive symbolises the slow retrieval of the repressed childhood memory and takes place right before oblivion takes control over Elín's life, in the form of the merciless disease of dementia. In both novels, the archive can be considered to represent a store of memories that become spectral due to their *return*: as well as because they bear with them important messages that call for active reactions, responses, resolutions. While Elín experiences a successful resolution to the haunting of the archive, the archive in *Fórnarleikar* remains haunted, by its gaps and silences, as well as continuing to be haunting, since it leaves Magni with no answers.

Spectral Memories from the Archive

Concluding remarks

This first part of the thesis examines the archive as storage for spectral memories: where documents and objects, retrieved from the archive, represent the *return* of forgotten memories. In some cases, the memories have been overlooked, in others they might have been actively silenced due to their shameful content, and in yet others they have been forcefully repressed because of their painful and tragic connotations. The series of photographs work with archived material that comprises *spectral memories*: the images haunt their viewers, disturbing their static ideas about a communal past. They raise critical questions which are left unanswered within the context of the exhibitions, therefore allowing the haunting to remain, as well as suggesting how they stay with their viewers after their visit to the exhibition space. The photographs thus offer an opportunity to consider the dynamics of remembering and forgetting in cultural memory, and how cultural memories are removed from the collective conscious of subjects, but allowed to return. This dynamic of remembering and forgetting, removal and return, calls for reflection, allowing people to reconsider their collective identities. The two novels represent spectral memories in a different way. Here the focus is on the individual's relation to the past, and how traumatic events can complicate that relationship: resulting in the repression of memories, silencing of events, but also their possible *spectral* return. The spectral presence of the traumatic or repressed memory illustrates how it stays with the subject, and

awaits the right time to resurface, calling for an active reception, reaction, response, and ultimately, and perhaps slightly ideally, a resolution, from the person holding on to the memory.

Spectrality focuses on how the archive becomes a *spectral space*, and its material thus *spectral memories*. For example when it is kept away from the public realm in shadowy marginal storage spaces, when it is haunted by its own precarious state, as well as how the archive is haunted by the memory objects that are left out of it, its gaps and erasures. Most importantly, it considers how the archive can become *haunting*: disturbing subjects and forcing them to look back, raise questions and seek answers. I have used the method of spectral reading when analysing the different case studies, which means that I have opted for a close reading of each piece of art or literature with emphasis on the spectre, in order to allow the spectral elements inherent in the artworks to unfold. For the visual artworks working with institutionalised archives and in the collective field of memory, that means drawing attention to how spectres destabilise conventional ideas on the past, on cultural memory as well as “national” identity in Iceland. In the case of the novels, memory and identity that is bound to the personal or private level of the family is *spectralised*, allowing the abstract and negotiable aspects of intergenerational memory to come to the fore. The circulation of memories from shadow spaces of the archive and to public places echoes the constant dynamics at stake in memory: how it is never stable and fixed, but constantly being reconceptualised, reframed and recycled.

Part II

Spectral Memories of the Financial Crash and Crisis

The aim of the second part of the thesis is to analyse the representations of the financial crash and crisis in Iceland in 2008 from the viewpoint of spectrality and memory studies. More precisely, I will examine the spectral and uncanny cultural responses in literature and visual arts in the aftermath of the collapse of the Icelandic banks, as the crash was in many ways a defining moment in Icelandic cultural memory. The crash and crisis of 2008 have two levels or dimensions in the Icelandic context. First is the economic collapse leading to a severe financial crisis, which is a transcultural event since it follows the larger context of a global economic breakdown that left other countries besides Iceland in a deep economic recession. The collapse of the banks in Iceland is in line with the larger context of a universal crisis that started with the bankruptcy of Lehmann Brothers on Wall Street in September 2008. Furthermore, uncanny cultural responses to this economic recession are not only limited to Iceland but are also to be found elsewhere, such as in Ireland, that was badly hit by the collapse, as well as in the United States.¹ This suggests the uncanny as a transcultural response to the crash and crisis; it is a well-established fact that publications of ghost stories and horror films, especially narratives of haunted houses, rise in times of economic instability.² The ghostly spaces of the period, meaning the half-built buildings whose construction came to a sudden halt with the crash, as well as the *fear* of losing one's home due to debt, give rise to narratives and images of haunted or uncanny houses. In this sense, the uncanny aesthetic represents concerns that are economic, as well as the basic fear of survival and of not having a roof over one's head.

The second dimension of the crash and crisis refers to how the economic collapse, and the near bankruptcy of the entire Icelandic economy, led to a “mnemonic crisis,” or a turning

¹ See for example Molly Slavin, “Ghost Stories, Ghost Estates: Melancholia in Irish Recession Literature” in *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 5(1):7, 1-21, and Annie McClanhahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2016). As the title suggests, Slavin addresses the cultural responses to the crash and crisis in Ireland, while McClanhahan discusses crime fiction and horror films following the crash and crisis in the U.S.

² “Of course locating this kind of connection between the haunted house story and contemporaneous economic unease is by no means a new critical approach. As Andrew Smith usefully outlines, there is a long tradition of connecting the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century gothic in particular to middle-class anxieties about financial insecurity and precarious social status. [...] Given the rather obvious (and oft noted) potential for drawing parallels between the specter of supernatural incursion and the specter of looming bankruptcy, it is hardly surprising then that at a time when the American middle classes have been through severe economic uncertainty last seen in the early 1970s the haunted house movie has made such a major comeback.” Bernice M. Murphy, “It is not the house that is haunted: Demons, Debt, and the family in Peril Formula in Recent Horror Cinema” in *Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era*, ed. Murray Leeder (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 244. Murphy refers here to Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840-1920: a Cultural History* (Manchester University Press, 2012).

point for collective identity and memory in Iceland. This mnemonic crisis was caused by the way in which the crash brought down the collective national ideal of the “business Vikings” and thus the old-established tradition of constructing a singular, unifying, proud and heroic nationalistic masculine national identity in Iceland. Here it is possible to examine how the uncanny aesthetics can be associated with different kinds of *spectres*. In this sense, this chapter relates to issues and topics discussed in the previous part of the thesis, and to *haunting*, that conveys tension between pride and shame in cultural memory. The crash generated a loss of a national ideal and initiated a period of a specific type of collective mourning that is inflected with melancholia; a mourning that cannot really take place since the subjects do not entirely understand what it is they mourn. The spectral and uncanny aesthetics express a process of mourning that becomes “impossible” and takes the form of *haunting*, hence the idea of “spectral mourning” that prompts the following questions: what exactly constitutes the loss following the crash? And what precisely are people mourning during the period of crisis? And above all; how is this expressed in the literature and visual art of the period?

Even though academics have analysed the political and historical texts that deal with the crash in the Icelandic context, less attention has been paid to the artistic response to the events, how the economic expansion, crash and crisis, influence and are reflected in fiction and visual art from the period.³ I will discuss four case studies in this second part of the thesis. In chapter three I look at two examples of fiction from the period; *I Remember You*, a horror story by the crime author Yrsa Sigurðardóttir (b. 1963), as well as the uncanny family-novel *Hvítfeld* by writer Kristín Eiríksdóttir. Both novels respond to the events of the crash and crisis with spectral aesthetics, yet in very different ways. The case studies of chapter four focus on visual spectral aesthetics; the untitled series of drawings by artist Guðjón Ketilsson (b. 1956) portray half-built houses whose construction came to a halt with the crash, and *Waiting*, a series of photographs by Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson (b. 1981) which expresses how the crash left its spectral marks on the cityscape of Reykjavík.

³ There are a few exceptions to this: Aleric Hall gives a broad account of the literature published in the wake of the crash and crisis in *Útrásarvíkingar: The Literature of the Icelandic Financial Crisis (2008-2014)* (punctum books, 2020); a BA thesis by Guðrún Baldvinsdóttir, “‘Hver á sér fegra föðurland?’ Þjóðarsjálfsmynd í íslenskum hrubókmenntum” from 2014; a website created by Jón Karl Helgason and Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, professors at the University of Iceland, following a course they taught on the subject: <http://hrunid.hi.is/skaldskapur/> [accessed 18.05.2020]

Chapter 3

Literary Ghosts and Spectral Memories of the Financial Crisis

This chapter discusses the historical context of the crisis as well as how the economic crisis also created a different kind of crisis and a turning point for collective memory and national identity in Iceland. I will then move on to discuss the concept of the uncanny, and explain how spectral and uncanny aesthetics express the state of being in spectral mourning, before moving on to the analysis of the case studies. The first case study is a ghostly crime story about hauntings in homes as well as in remote derelict places, and the second is a novel that offers an uncanny viewpoint on the traditional family saga. In the wake of the banking crash, Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, who was already an established crime fiction writer at the time, changed her narrative tone and started writing horror novels about hauntings and hidden secrets in post-economic crash settings.⁴ These works of ghostly crime fiction became hugely popular in Iceland during the years of crisis, and made Sigurðardóttir into one of the major crime writers in the country. Several years after the publication of these books, when Sigurðardóttir has again turned to writing more traditional non-ghostly crime fiction, these post-crash horror novels have become spectral memorials of a defining moment for cultural memory in Iceland.

Kristín Eiríksdóttir is another author who uses uncanny aesthetics when writing about the events of the crash and crisis. Her novel *Hvítfeld: Fjölskyldusaga* (Whitefur: A Family history), from 2012, presents an entirely different approach to spectralities and the uncanny than in the crime novel's case.⁵ Here the uncanny is not to be found in ghostly figures and hauntings in the traditional sense, but in the defamiliarisation of family life that make the houses of the narrative "haunted" in a more metaphorical sense. This act of defamiliarisation is reflected in the narrative form itself, adding an experimental meta-layer to the novel. *Hvítfeld* is therefore an interesting point of comparison to the hauntings in the genre fiction by Sigurðardóttir, and to the traditional notion of the ghost story, as both novels prove to have mourning and grief as central themes. In order to relate the narratives of haunting to the theme of mourning, I will focus on how the characters respond to the ghost in *I Remember You*, as well as how they react to their feelings of loss in both novels. How do they act in their process of mourning? Are these characters melancholic and inactive or do the narratives open up to the possibility of using the period of mourning as a phase of reflection and of gaining something

⁴ Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, *Horfðu á mig* (English: *Someone to Watch over Me*, Reykjavík: Veröld, 2009); *Ég man þig* (Engl: *I Remember You*, Reykjavík: Veröld, 2010); *Brakið* (Engl. *Silence of the Sea*, Reykjavík: Veröld, 2011), and *Kuldi* (Engl. *The Undesired*, Reykjavík: Veröld, 2012).

⁵ Kristín Eiríksdóttir, *Hvítfeld: Fjölskyldusaga*.

new instead of what was lost? These questions will be related to reflections on identity by focusing on how these narratives respond to the identity problematics of the period. It is important to note that the historical and theoretical discussion of this chapter not only lays the foundation for the analysis of the two novels, but also serves as an important theoretical backdrop for the study of the visual art series in chapter four.

The Crash: a collective shock

In October 2008, one of the largest bank crashes in history struck Iceland, a country of three hundred and thirty five thousand inhabitants.⁶ The *crash*, caused by the overheating and overexpansion of the Icelandic financial market, with excessive investments made by Icelandic businessmen abroad, led to a severe financial crisis, accompanied by a crisis in foreign diplomacy and communication due to international debts.⁷ It also led to mass protests and the biggest demonstrations in the history of Iceland, “the pots and pans revolution,” where people came together every day for several weeks to demand the resignation of the government and the head of the Central Bank.⁸ Many associate the key moment of the collapse with the speech made by Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde on 6 October 2008. He described rather sombrely the impending national bankruptcy, ending with the words: *God bless Iceland*. The expression, which had never really been used by Icelandic politicians during formal speeches, suggested that Iceland was all of a sudden placed in an unforeseen turmoil of disaster, with no possible solution in sight. Historian Valur Ingimundarson describes it as a “collective shock,” and the most profound since the foundation of the Icelandic Republic in 1944.⁹ In the weeks that followed, politicians referred constantly to the events in terms of bad weather; a storm that the nation had to wait off and unite against. This figurative language of darkness and stormy weather evokes associations with the uncanny, as well as removing agency, since a storm is not caused by a human agent. Thus, when asked about responsibility in the wake of the crash, politicians were quick to state the importance of not personifying the problem but rather uniting

⁶ Jón Gunnar Bernburg, *Economic Crisis and Mass Protest: The Pots and Pans Revolution in Iceland* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 2. Refers to Guðni Th Jóhannesson, *Hrunið: Ísland á barmi gjaldþrots og upplausnar* (Reykjavík: JPV, 2009).

⁷ Aleric Hall uses the word ‘Crash’ with a capital C for the moment when the Icelandic banks collapsed: “The economic crisis this wrought is generally referred to in Icelandic as the *hrun*, literally ‘collapse’ (also *kreppa* ‘difficulty, tight spot’) — hereafter rendered in this book as the Crash.” *Útrásarvikingar*, 8.

⁸ Bernburg gives a good overview of the events in October 2008 in his introduction, 1 – 16.

⁹ Valur Ingimundarson, “The Politics of Transition, Memory, and Justice: Assigning Blame for the Crisis” in *Iceland’s Financial Crisis: The Politics of Blame, Protest and Reconstruction*, ed. Valur Ingimundarson, Philippe Urfalino, Irma Erlingsdóttir (New York: Routledge, 2016), 140-155, 143.

against it: emphasising the need for unity during moments of crisis instead of looking for culpable individuals and pointing fingers at possible wrongdoers.¹⁰

In recent years it has become more and more evident how the events of collapse and crisis have been met with *passivity* in the political domain, as there seems to be no agreement on the political responsibility in the course of the events, and the reforms promised in the wake of the pots and pans revolution have also been limited. Ingimundarson writes of “selective justice and failed political reform” in Icelandic post-crash society, while Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir describes how people seem to want to forget about the pots and pans protest: “despite the success of the protests, people do not seem to have a need to memorialise and celebrate the ‘Pots and Pans Revolution’ for a variety of reasons. Perhaps this is mainly as a result of the sense of disappointment with the limited reforms that have been accomplished since.”¹¹ The most obvious example is the political reaction to the “truth report” written by an independent committee commissioned by the state to investigate the causes of the crash.¹² Ingimundarson describes how the report was an answer to the demand of seeking accountability for the economic collapse, and how its publication was highly anticipated by the public. When it was published in 2010, “it proved to be highly critical of domestic political and financial elites,” thereby calling for the answerability of the politicians in charge at the time: ministers from the right-wing Independence Party, which was in office both during the period of economic expansion that led to the crash and during its occurrence, as well as political agents from the Progressive Party and the Social Democrats.¹³ Ingimundarson describes how, at the time of its publication, the report became a “foundational document” for collective identity in Iceland, by creating a sense of cohesion among the Icelandic people during unstable times, yet at the same time different groups came to interpret it in their own interest: for the left the report proved the culpability of politicians; for the right, the corruption of bankers.¹⁴ With the passing of time, and with no one mentioned in the report ready to face responsibility, the report slowly

¹⁰ Guðni Elísson, “Vogun vinnur ... : hvar liggja rætur íslenska fjármálahrunsins” in *Saga* 2009, 47 (2), 117-146, 129. The author refers to the words of Geir H. Haarde, the prime minister at the time in interviews in the media. For example: “Ekki persónugera viðfangsefnið” mbl.is, 15.10.2008. Available online: http://www.mbl.is/mm/frettir/innlent/2008/10/15/ekki_personugera_vidfangsefni/ [accessed 15.6.2020]

¹¹ Ingimundarson, “Narrating Iceland’s Financial Crisis: Contested Memories of Blame, Justice and Reconstruction,” *Collapse of Memory – Memory of Collapse: Narrating Past, Presence and Future about Periods of Crisis*, eds. Alexander Drost, Olga Sasunkevich, Joachim Schiedermaier, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Köln Weimar: Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie, 2019), 111-131, 113; and Guðmundsdóttir, “The Black Cone: Memory and Memorialisation in Post-Recession Iceland,” *ibid.*, 133-148, 146.

¹² Ingimundarson, “Narrating Iceland’s Financial Crisis”, 112-113.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

lost its status as a unifying document, and has largely been forgotten.¹⁵ It thus draws attention to how the events have been repressed in the political domain, and, above all, silenced by powerful political parties.



Image 3.1 comic by Elín Elísabet for *The Reykjavik Grapevine*, published September 23, 2017.

Further examples of this silencing appear in a pamphlet from the 2016 parliamentary elections, distributed to every home in the country, by the Independence Party.¹⁶ The party was back in government at that time and the pamphlet, entitled “On the Right Way,” presents a timeline which mentions their main achievements but nowhere refers to the privatisation of the Icelandic banks that some consider to have led to the economic crash, nor the crisis and recession that followed. Other and perhaps more important examples are to be found in the political personas of two recent prime ministers. Bjarni Benediktsson, leader of the aforementioned Independence Party in Iceland, and the prime minister until the parliamentary elections in October 2017, not only had his name in the Panama papers but seems to have sold large assets in one of the failed banks moments before the collapse. This was revealed in headlines that circulated in the

¹⁵ There are a few exceptions to this: prime minister Geir H. Haarde was charged with violating the laws on ministerial responsibility and tried in the Supreme Court in Iceland. He was convicted but did not have to face any punishment. And as Elín Elísabet’s cartoon expresses, *some* bankers were jailed.

¹⁶ “Á réttri leið” (e. On the Right Way) a pamphlet published by the Independent Party for the parliamentary elections in October 2016.

Icelandic and British media in October 2017.¹⁷ During the elections in autumn 2017, Benediktsson referred to the period before the collapse and crisis as a “distant reality,” emphasising that today “we”, politicians and voters, were facing a “new reality.”¹⁸ Benediktsson’s discourse in this instance evokes the process of repression; when something is actively forgotten, pushed aside, silenced because it does not serve present purposes. Paul Connerton terms this behaviour “repressive erasure,” when something is erased from memory and “consigned to oblivion.”¹⁹ Connerton states that: “Repressive erasure can be employed to deny the fact of historical rupture as well as to bring about historical break.”²⁰ This kind of tactic or reaction is doubtless common among politicians who seek to rewrite history to serve their objectives in the present. However, the fact that Benediktsson and his party still received the largest percentage of votes in the election brings the attention to the memory mechanism of their voters; why do they choose to forget this recent past and inconvenient truth about their leaders’ actions during the crash?

The other example is Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, who was prime minister during the leaking of the Panama Papers, in which his name appeared in relation to a company called Wintris. He was exposed during an interview with the Swedish journalist Sven Bergman for the Swedish national public television broadcaster SVT and was forced to resign after a mass protest in Reykjavík.²¹ The reaction of the public, the demonstration as well as its effect of bringing down the sitting prime minister, testifies to a new protest culture that has developed in the wake of the crash and the pots and pans revolution.²² It also points out how the memories of the crash, due to their repression, are still *haunting* Icelandic society, or as Ingimundarson puts it: “This dramatic episode [Panama Paper protests that forced the sitting prime minister to resign] was a reminder that despite having recovered fully in economic terms thanks to a tourist boom, Iceland was – and still is – haunted by the trauma of the financial crash, which is the

¹⁷ Jon Henley, “Iceland PM sold bank assets hours before financial crash, leaks show,” *The Guardian*, 6 October 2017, Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/06/iceland-pm-sold-bank-assets-hours-before-financial-crash-leaks-show> [accessed 15.06.2020]

¹⁸ Silfur Egils, *Rúv* National Radio and TV broadcast in Iceland, 29 October 2017. Here the old and new reality also refer to the new political culture. Before the collapse the tradition of having a few old-established parties in parliament, versus the new reality of having many smaller and newly formed parties in government such as the Pirates, Viðreisn, Björt Framtíð, etc.

¹⁹ Connerton, “Seven types of Forgetting”, 60. Refers to Pierre Bertrand, *L’oubli: révolution ou mort de l’histoire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1975).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ See for example clips from the interview on the website of the Icelandic national radio: “Sigmundur Davíð gekk út ur viðtali við svt”, 3.4.2016, Available online: <https://www.ruv.is/frett/sigmundur-david-gekk-ut-ur-vidtali-vid-svt> [accessed 15.06.2020]

²² Guðmundsdóttir, “The Black Cone”, 134.

largest that any country has experienced when measured in terms of the size of economy.”²³ This idea of haunting and the persistence of a problematic memory becomes even more evident in light of Gunnlaugsson’s comeback on the political stage, as his new political party, created around his persona, received around ten percent of the vote in the elections in October 2017.

The collective memories of the crash are above all *contested*, meaning that people hold differing views on the events of the collapse, its causes and effects.²⁴ While for some the collapse of the banks initiated a new protest culture by momentarily calling for a collective critical awareness and agency of the public in fighting against corruption in the political and economic domain, for others it is a singular black spot in the otherwise heroic story of the Icelandic nation.²⁵ Both perspectives point to how many have chosen to repress the memory of the collapse, in order to forget it; the first group because of the disappointment following the limited effects of the protests and the second group because they feel that the brief moment of economic crisis does not fit within the larger national narrative. Guðmundsdóttir elaborates:

There is no consensus on how the story of the unprecedented economic and political crisis should be told. And although the country now in 2018 is well under way in its economic recovery, the political ramifications seem far from being resolved, as governments have toppled twice in just over a year due to political scandals, and the political landscape is greatly affected by uncertainty with commentators, politicians, and journalists regularly evoking contested memories in their discourse of the recent tumultuous past.²⁶

Cultural memory studies tend to focus on contested memories; memory that is challenged and questioned by its blind spots, framing trauma at the core of memory studies, as a form of memory that refuses to be narrativised.²⁷ Hall discusses how the events of the crash have been

²³ Guðmundsdóttir, “The Black Cone”, 111-112.

²⁴ Guðmundsdóttir speaks of “a memorial of contested past” (139) in her discussion on the crash and the sculpture *Black Cone*, and Ingimundarson uses the term in the title of his article: “Narrating Iceland’s Financial Crisis: Contested Memories of Blame, Justice and Reconstruction” while he also conceptualises the crash as a collective shock, struggle, even trauma when he states that politics in Iceland are still haunted by the “trauma” of the crash, 111-112.

²⁵ See discussion of the spectrum of memories in Guðmundsdóttir, “The Black Cone”, 135.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 134.

²⁷ Academics have, however, critiqued this assumption of trauma being the core of memory, and Andreas Huyssen for example stresses that memory and trauma should not be equated: “It has been all too tempting to some to think of trauma as the hidden core of all memory. [...] both are marked by instability, transitoriness, and structures of repetition. But to collapse memory into trauma ... would unduly confine our understanding of memory, marking it

compared to traumatic events, such as the 9/11 attacks in the USA, and one must admit that the prime minister's expression "God bless Iceland" evokes the sentiment associated with speeches made by the US president at that moment in time.²⁸ However, instead of defining the crash as a *national trauma* and comparing it to large-scale terrorist attacks such as 9/11, I would argue that the crash represents an event that challenges memory and highlights its dynamics, and in this way requires to question its construction and expose its workings.²⁹ In terms of spectrality, the crash represents a blind spot of memory that is not dealt with but repressed, and returns because it refuses to be forgotten. The crash is therefore a strong example of a *spectral memory*. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Derrida draws, in *Specters of Marx*, a strong connection between hauntology and the politics of memory: "So it would be necessary [...] to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without the commerce of ghosts. [...] And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance of generations."³⁰ The story of the collapse of the banks in Iceland in October 2008, that almost led to the bankruptcy of a whole nation, is precisely a story that concerns such *politics* of memory and identity.

The Crash: crisis of memory and identity

The crash brings to the fore politics of memory and identity, as the two are tangled up in manifold ways. As the quotation from John R. Gillis, cited in the introduction to the thesis, explains: "The parallel lives of these two terms [memory and identity] alert us to the fact that the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity."³¹ The construction, even dramatisation, of a national identity became pervasive during the era of prosperity and the international expansion of the Icelandic banks, when Icelandic politicians and authorities actively participated in a very questionable staging of a national image. In an article on the

too exclusively in terms of pain, suffering and loss." *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsest and the Politics of Memory*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford, 2003), 8.

²⁸ Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, 55.

²⁹ As I discussed in the introduction to the thesis, dynamics is a key concept in contemporary cultural memory studies and stresses how memory should be conceptualised as a process or a movement instead of a phenomenon that is static in time and space, and where forgetting is an integral part of memory and as important as remembering. On the dynamics of cultural memory see e.g. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, "Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics" in *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, 1-14, 2. On the important part played by forgetting in memory see Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir, *Representations of Forgetting*, 2.

³⁰ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 15.

³¹ Gillis "Introduction: Memory and Identity: History of a Relationship", 3.

representations of national identity in Icelandic art, art historian Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir discusses what has since become known as the infamous *image report* created by “the Prime Minister’s public image committee,” published in March 2008, on the eve of the expansion and only a few months before the collapse.³² Ólafsdóttir discusses how the committee seeks to create a homogenous image of a nation among whose main characteristics is a “natural strength” that laid “the foundation for its dynamic business activities.”³³ These ideals in identity construction date far back in the Icelandic context, or to the period when Icelanders started campaigning for their independence from the Danish crown. Historian Sigríður Matthíasdóttir has analysed nation-building and identity construction in Iceland in the early twentieth century from a gendered perspective.³⁴ At that moment, according to her, nationalism in Iceland is redefined and reshaped with the construction of a national “myth” that consists of two aspects. First is the communal cultural understanding that the nation is one entity, one “living organism,” and one “national person with one identity.”³⁵ Second to that is the collective historical understanding where a myth of a “Golden Age” is constructed as the foundation for the modern nation state.³⁶ This second aspect is an example of prevailing cultural memory that is established and institutionalised to support the idea of Iceland as an independent nation state. Matthíasdóttir elaborates:

The main purpose of the creation of the Golden Age myth was to define the so-called Icelandic nature in such a manner that the Icelandic nation would appear to have both the natural urge and the qualifications to found a modern nation-state. It was proclaimed that modern political ideals had flowered in the medieval period, as natural qualifications of the Icelandic nation, and that they should now be resurrected.³⁷

³² Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, “Ímynd Íslands, sagan, menningararfurinn og hin ýmsu sjálf Íslendingins: Þjóðarsál íslenskrar samtímamyndlistar” in *Saga*, autumn 2008, 56-85.

See: *Ímynd Íslands. Styrkur, staða og stefna. Skýrsla nefndar forsætisráðuneytis* (mars 2008). Available online: https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/forsaetisraduneyti-media/media/Skyrslur/Forsaetisr_arsskyrsla_END2.pdf [accessed 15.06.2020]. I say infamous because the report has been critiqued by many Icelandic academics such as Sumarliði Ísleifsson and Íris Ellenberger.

³³ Ólafsdóttir, “Ímynd Íslands”, 85. I use the author’s own translation in the English abstract that follows the article.

³⁴ Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 371.

Anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir has examined how Icelandic school textbooks, written during the first and second decades of the twentieth century and used in elementary schools for the next seventy to eighty years, are filled with nationalistic images and ideas about the superiority of the Icelandic nation.³⁸ The textbooks, such as two books both titled *Íslandssaga* (History of Iceland) were aimed at children in elementary school, and describe the origin of the Icelandic people as being the “crème de la crème” of the Nordic nations.³⁹ Loftsdóttir describes how these ideas or “spectres of the past” appear as revenants during the economic expansion, and are adjusted to the values of contemporary globalised society.⁴⁰ This becomes apparent when certain terms from the period are considered. The myth of the golden age is for example imbedded in the word *Útrásin*, “expansion” or “outburst,” that was used to describe the international expansion of the Icelandic financial market when Icelandic banks started buying up and taking over foreign banks and companies. In addition, the term “útrás” has connotations of a form of aggressive behaviour, as it also refers to “outlet” or “outburst” suggesting a relation to the idea of violent conquest. The aforementioned image-report reflects how the “útrásarvíkingur” or “business Viking”, became a collective symbol that the Icelandic nation was supposed to look up to and admire, a heroic image celebrating international business ventures, profit and economic growth, while also referring strongly to the cultural heritage and memory of the nation.⁴¹

Anthropologists Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir and Júlíana Magnúsdóttir discuss how the image of the Viking had the status of cultural hegemony in Icelandic society from the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth.⁴² It was used to confirm masculine superiority in Icelandic society and to reinforce men as a dominant group.⁴³ This tradition is updated with the image of the business Viking and used to institutionalise the importance and greatness of businessmen in Icelandic society in the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Guðni Elísson describes how the discourse, imagery and symbols of the expansion refer back to the literature of heroes in the

³⁸ Loftsdóttir, “Kjarnmesta fólkið í heimi: Þrástef íslenskrar þjóðernishyggju í gegnum Lýðveldisbaráttu, útrás og kreppu” in *Ritið* 2-3/2009, 113-139, 117.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴¹ Ólafsdóttir progressively deconstructs this unified idea of a homogenous national identity by discussing the works of more than twenty contemporary Icelandic artists concerned with the idea of being Icelandic in many different ways. The diverse works of the artists point towards the contradictory and constantly shifting notion of an Icelandic identity; and how that in fact entails multiple versions of cultural identities.

⁴² Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir and Júlíana Magnúsdóttir, “Ingólfur Arnarson, Björgólfur Thor og Ólafur bóndi á Þorvaldseyri: Karlmennska, kynjakerfi og þjóðernissjálfsmynd eftir efnahagshrun” in *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XII Stjórn málafræðideild*, lecture from a conference October 2011, 45-53, 46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

Icelandic sagas, establishing an essence for the Icelandic stereotype, whose roots lie in the physical and mental abilities of heroes of the middle ages.⁴⁵ Elísson explains how the Viking image was supported by politicians in speeches and discussion in media, as well as by the businessmen themselves, who used Viking symbols for their own visual imagery.⁴⁶ The idea of the Icelandic business Viking can only be understood, according to Loftsdóttir, in the context of nationalism that originates in the romantic period and with the birth of the nation; when the Icelandic people started campaigning for independence from the Danish crown.⁴⁷

In *Útrásarvíkingar! The Literature of the 2008 Icelandic financial crisis*, Aleric Hall stresses the anxieties brought on by the crash as a form of *post-colonial anxiety* that mostly concern Iceland's place in the world in terms of imperialism – as a victim, participant and beneficiary.⁴⁸ Post-colonial anxiety suggests that the fact that Iceland was a colony, and a subordinate to the Danish king and nation, challenges the proud national identity founded on ideals such as independence and superiority. The crash therefore becomes a painful reminder of the colonial history of Icelanders, a period inflected with shame and denial, which explains the need for repressing the embarrassing memory, and where repression and denial appears as a sort of defence mechanism. Thus the severe economic concerns, the “spectre of looming bankruptcy,” and the overwhelming feeling of failure during the crash and crisis, caused the breakdown of the national ideal Icelanders had so proudly built for themselves over the past hundred years or more. But what does this collapse of a national identity, this era of identity politics or problematics, mean exactly?

On the one hand, Ingimundarson states that the Icelandic people had usually taken on the role of victims in the context of international affairs and external interactions, first in relation to being a Danish colony, then in relation to the British and later American occupation during World War II, and again in the Cod Wars against the British from the 1950s to the 1970s.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Elísson, “Vogun vinnur”, 123.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁷ Loftsdóttir, “Kjarnmesta fólkið”, 114.

⁴⁸ “But it is also partly because Icelanders have realised that to understand the mentalities behind the Crash itself, it is necessary to understand the relationship between Icelandic identities and the sometimes far-flung Danish empire to which Iceland once belonged, as well as the neo-imperialism of the USA and other European countries—that is, the mutated forms that nineteenth-century colonial imperialism has taken as countries seek to achieve the extractive economic dominance once associated with empire without actually using direct rule, or indeed admitting (even to themselves) to having a colonial agenda. Postcolonial thought is necessary to understand how Iceland has both been a victim of imperialisms old and new, but also a participant in them, and indeed a beneficiary.” Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, 48.

⁴⁹ Valur Ingimundarson, interview on a lecture he gave at a symposium on the responsibility of the University in the events of the crash, in a newspaper: Karl Blöndal “‘Fyrsta heims ríki’ í ‘þriðja heims stöðu’ Í kjölfar hrunsins takast Íslendingar á við fortíðina” in *Morgunblaðið*, November 22, 2009. Available online: <http://www.mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/1311272> [accessed 15.6.2020]

After the collapse, Icelanders could no longer play this part of the victim, since their image has changed into being the perpetrators who have caused great economic distress for hundreds and thousands of people. Loftsdóttir, on the other hand, argues that the economic crash undermines the national identity Icelanders have created for themselves, as being a superior kin with direct lineage to Vikings – the true heroes of the ancient Nordic world.⁵⁰ The economic collapse did not only overthrow the image of the Icelandic business Viking, but also the masculine ideal that had dominated the cultural identity of Icelanders since the nineteenth century. Or as Sigríður Matthíasdóttir states: “From a gender perspective it is clear that the ‘nature’ of the Icelandic nation was entirely masculine; in the nationalist myth, the identity of the Icelandic nation was constructed as something close to the modern individual and masculine ideal.”⁵¹ Thus the proud national identity was only based on one dominant cultural group: “the urbanized middle-class men who gradually acquired power in the new nation-state.”⁵² The aforementioned schoolbooks Loftsdóttir discusses not only depict a discourse on the superiority of the Icelandic nation, but also portray the story of the nation as being the story of Icelandic *men*, hardworking and righteous, who built the country.⁵³ The crash therefore also initiated a (temporary) “fall” of masculinity where the period of crisis also introduces a phase of “hurt” masculinity. This suggests how the crisis following the crash becomes a period of loss, where people mourn their collective ideals, among others the business Viking. However, in the next section I will discuss how this period also opens up for what I term *spectral mourning*: a moment of critical reflection that supports the possibility of looking for or forming new and updated collective ideals that, for example, do not only serve one dominant cultural group. These identity problematics are addressed in the literature of the era. I will discuss *crash literature* more thoroughly in the next section, as it offers the opportunity of exploring the way narratives construct identities, and how literature written in the time of crisis responds to the national narratives of collective ideals and identities. The fall of the masculine ideal in the form of the business Viking is addressed in the horror novel *I Remember You* by Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, where the male character in the story is not only responsible for the impending bankruptcy of the family, but also brings his wife to a threatening haunted house by taking the initiative to renovate an old abandoned house located in rural Iceland. His masculinity is damaged in the narrative but he seeks to regain his dignity by restoring the house as well as his finances – with horrible consequences.

⁵⁰ Loftsdóttir, “Kjarnmesta fólkið í heimi”, 113.

⁵¹ Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*, 371.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵³ Loftsdóttir, “Kjarnmesta fólkið í heimi”, 118.

Post-colonial anxiety, and the relationship between the crash, national identity and race is evident in the “we are not terrorists” social-media campaign, which was the response of a group of Icelanders to the act of the British government invoking the 2001 Antiterrorism, Crime and Security Act to freeze Icelandic assets in Britain in October 2008, at the high point of the crash.⁵⁴ The campaign is discussed by both Hall and Loftsdóttir in this regard; it consisted of Icelandic people posting photos of themselves on Facebook, holding handwritten signs with the slogan “we are not terrorists, Mr. Brown.” As Loftsdóttir argues, the purpose of the campaign seems to be to reclaim the former cultural position of Icelanders, the one they held before the events of the financial crash and during the expansion, by making use of their appearance. Or as Hall puts it: “Kristin Loftsdóttir has discussed how this campaign was not a declaration of solidarity with the many people around the world oppressed by the “War on Terror,” but implicitly rather a bid to situate Icelanders and Britons as people who ought to be standing in solidarity against the spectre of the Islamist terrorist.”⁵⁵ Here, the colonial exhibition in the Tivoli in 1905, discussed in part I of this thesis, comes to mind, and the vociferous protests of the Icelandic students living in Copenhagen who were furious at the thought of Icelandic women being put on display with “negroes and eskimos.”⁵⁶ Thus the main anxiety of Icelanders, according to Hall, concerns their identity and how they are represented in the eyes of the world, which reflects how the discourse on Icelandic identity is deeply rooted in Icelandic culture dating back to Danish colonialism.⁵⁷ Identity anxiety and self-image crisis is in fact the main plot line of *Hvítfeld*, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter, where it is expressed on the level of the individual and through the main protagonist’s fabrications of multiple fake identities. That plotline is interwoven with narratives of mourning, indicating how during the time of crisis the public is collectively mourning its heroic national identity, even suggesting how the image of the heroic Viking, so deep-rooted in Icelandic memory, becomes a spectre that haunts the nation during the post-crash period. However, this period of mourning may also open up for a moment of reflection, encouraging mourners to approach these politics of identity critically and looking for new and more “updated” collective ideals.

⁵⁴ Loftsdóttir, “Kjarnmesta fólkið í heimi”, 53.

⁵⁵ Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, 56.

⁵⁶ „Hjálendu“ síningin danska” in *Ingólfur*, 18. desember 1904, 205-6þ From Loftsdóttir, “Hlutgerving”, 424.

⁵⁷ Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, 56.

Aesthetic response to the Crash: the spectral-uncanny

In 2019, a decade had passed since Elísson stated that literature on the Icelandic banking crash had become a genre in the cultural history of Iceland, referring to the non-fictional texts written about the economic collapse.⁵⁸ I mentioned in the introduction that scholarly articles have been written on the crash and crisis, focusing on the historical and political aspects of the event. But less attention has been paid to the artistic response to the events, how the economic expansion, crash and crisis, influence and are reflected in fiction and visual art from the period. The aforementioned book on Icelandic crash literature by Aleric Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, is an exception, and provides a good map of the literature published during the period that responds directly to the events of expansion, crash and crisis. At this current moment, the crash genre has spread out to other fields, and today one can speak of a crash genre in literature, genre fiction and visual arts, as well as in poetry, film, theatre and music.⁵⁹ Artistic practices are cultural products, created in a specific spatiotemporal context, and they reflect that context, whether intentionally or not. Literature written during the time of crisis, and artworks created after the collapse, are therefore the product of that cultural situation, *cultural memories* that can offer viewpoints on how to address the events and their impact on individuals and groups living in Icelandic society at the time: responses to the crash that might create new approaches, social products that are also socially productive, offering reflection on the era or, in best case scenario, intervention.

But what defines *crash literature* exactly? The most general definition of crash literature is a broad one. Hall refers to the speculations of Björn Þór Vilhjálmsson from 2010, when reviewing the novel *Gæska* by Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl, a very direct reaction to the events of crash and crisis. Vilhjálmsson states that it is a chronological definition – every piece of literature published in Iceland during the period is in one way or another crash literature.⁶⁰ For Hall, books and literature are important for cultural memory, and that function is highlighted during the period of crash and crisis, when novels memorialise the events in a different manner from e.g. newspapers and articles: “literary writing has a role in memorialising a key moment in an ongoing tale of crisis that may outlast most of the journalism or political speeches produced at the time. And at their best, Crash-novels provide some of the most striking commentary on the 2007–8 Western financial crisis generally.”⁶¹ Even though Hall defines

⁵⁸ Elísson, „Vogun vinnur“, 118.

⁵⁹ Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

crash literature as novels published during the crash period, he defines *Atómstöðin* by Halldór Laxness, a novel published in 1948, as the first Crash book.⁶² Written at a turning point in the history of the country in light of the recent independence from Denmark in 1944, occupation by US military, as well as the entry into NATO in 1946, Hall describes it as a “useful reference point” to understand literature written in response to the crash, and the issue of debt in Icelandic culture: “Although traditional sentiments like ‘það sé ekki gott að deyja í skuld’ (‘it’s not good to die in debt’) occasionally appear in post-Crash fiction, a long history of colonial use of debt slavery followed by post-independence high inflation has encouraged debt as a central part of Icelandic life, a reality which *Atómstöðin* reflects.”⁶³ By defining *Atómstöðin* as the first Icelandic crash literature, Hall denotes specific themes as fundamental to the genre, such as the discourse on independence and identity, as well as on economy and debt, hence echoing the idea of the two-dimensional crisis, economic and mnemonic.

Hall discusses *Konur* (Women) by Steinar Bragi, which was written before the crash but published in the immediate aftermath, often considered to be *the crash book par excellence*, being an insightful commentary and critique on Icelandic society during the economic expansion.⁶⁴ As with the novels discussed later in this chapter, *Konur* is an uncanny response to the crash and crisis – or, to be more precise, to the economic expansion that led to those events. It tells the story of a young woman who returns to Iceland after having spent some years abroad working and studying, and in the wake of what seems to be a failed relationship. A young banker, a type of “útrásarvíkingur” or business Viking, offers her the chance to house-sit his luxurious apartment in a high-rise in Reykjavík with an ocean view. The narrative in *Konur* has a strikingly uncanny tone to it, which at times even becomes horrifying. It is clear from the beginning of the story that there is something not right in the young banker’s house-sitting offer to the young woman. As the narrative unravels the reader slowly learns how the woman is in fact a prisoner in the house, by being involuntarily and unknowingly a participant in some sort of video/performance art by an internationally renowned artist. What makes *Konur* highly uncanny is its setting: the building where the story takes place and where the protagonist is held captive. Even though the house is not haunted in the traditional sense by spectres or other supernatural beings, it is threatening and turns against its inhabitant, the young woman. The house, as home or space of living, is an important symbol in crash literature and has direct

⁶² Halldór Laxness, *Atómstöðin* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1948). English translation: *The Atom Station*, trans. Magnus Magnusson (London: Methuen, 1961).

⁶³ Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, 22.

⁶⁴ Steinar Bragi, *Konur* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2008).

correlation to the social conditions of the period, where the fear and threat of losing one's home was imminent and real. Hall explains how the crash mostly had to do with the housing market:

The effects of the Crash were of course numerous and diverse, but for most Icelanders were felt first and foremost in terms of one of our most basic necessities, housing. Unwisely and often unlawfully encouraged to take out mortgages denominated in currencies other than the króna (on the assumption that these debts would depreciate as the króna grew irresistibly stronger), 40% of households soon found themselves significantly in arrears on mortgage payments.⁶⁵

As the transcultural viewpoint illustrates, this crisis of housing was not only felt locally in Iceland but on a global scale, as one of the fundamental crashes of the global economy had to do with real estate and the housing market. Home-building in Iceland, as well as in Ireland and Spain, had over-expanded, leaving empty or half-built houses, even whole neighbourhoods, in limbo during the crisis. Some of these unfinished structures are even now to be found in the urban space of these countries. This effect explains the common and often noted rise of stories of haunted houses in the aftermath of financial crash and crisis; since that kind of narrative fundamentally expresses explicitly a threat of losing one's home.⁶⁶ The house becomes a physical manifestation of the crash, according to Hall, who states: "Crash-novels – like many of their American counterparts – probably most frequently and consistently express anxiety about social and economic formations through the architecture of domesticity."⁶⁷ Hall discusses how the high-rises like the one in *Konur* become a recurrent symbol in crash literature: "Indeed, buildings of this kind [plush empty flats built during the boom years] turn up repeatedly in Crash-themed fiction as a figure for the misogynistic masculinity of the boom and its erosion of domesticity."⁶⁸ These high-rises have in fact become one of the major symbols of the economic expansion, and can be seen in one of the photographs by photographer Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson in chapter four of the thesis.

⁶⁵ Hall, *Útrásarvíkingar!*, 8. Refers to Eiríkur Bergmann, *Iceland and the International Financial Crisis: Boom, Bust and Recovery* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 129.

⁶⁶ As stated in the introduction to this part II, this theme, homes-under-threat, is a recurrent one in crisis literature worldwide.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 115. Refers to Michael K. Walonen, *Contemporary World Narrative Fiction and the Spaces of Neoliberalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 78.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

Space and location play a vital role in uncanny aesthetics and, before moving on, I would like to call attention to the intrinsic relation between houses and homes, identity and self-image; how the human subject perceives itself in the world. The house that becomes haunted is therefore not only a representation of economic concerns and fear of survival, but also announces how selfhood and identity becomes destabilised, therefore also relating to the mnemonic crisis following the crash in Iceland. The house is first and foremost a shelter, but I would argue that in the context of the crash it also becomes a symbol of country and nation, people belonging to a specific place, a tradition that is uprooted, exposed and threatened with uncertainty during crisis. As Daisy Connan states: “Associated with the breakdown of the boundaries between strange and familiar, the uncanny is an elusive literary and colloquial term which expresses the disturbance of the *chez soi* [home/with oneself] both as location or environment and as an instance of selfhood.”⁶⁹ Here, one can read a certain resonance between the environment that during the time of crisis was affected by the economic recession, and a post-crash selfhood in mourning: as uprooted, exposed and vulnerable. This emphasis and importance of space and architecture, or rather, houses and homes for identity and self-image, relate the genre of crash literature to the *uncanny*.

The term describes first and foremost aesthetics, but it has also been used to express a social condition under the influence of capitalist alienation and defamiliarisation.⁷⁰ Freud defines the concept as an aesthetic category that applies to narratives that arouse dread and excite fear. The English translation “uncanny” of the German term “unheimlich” does not imply the concept’s essential relations to the idea of home: “unheimlich” literally means “unhomely.” However, problems do not only arise when the term is translated. Freud discusses how “Heimlich”, usually understood as the opposite of “unheimlich”, has already a twofold meaning in the German language.⁷¹ On the one hand it refers to the intimate space of the home and is linked to security and nostalgia, the familiar and agreeable.⁷² On the other hand, it means something that is concealed, hidden and kept out of sight.⁷³ The negative prefix “un-“, adds

⁶⁹ Daisy Connan, *Subjects Not-at-home: Forms of the Uncanny in the Contemporary French Novel*. Emmanuel Carrère, Marie NDiaye, Eugène Savitzkaya (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2010), 11.

⁷⁰ This twofold aspect of the uncanny is discussed by both Anthony Vidler in his book *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, from 1992 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press) and Annette Masschelein in her book *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory* from 2011 (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2012).

⁷¹ Freud refers to the dictionary *Wörterbuch* by Daniel Sanders from 1860 when discussing the relation between the two words “Heimlich” and “unheimlich”; the complication lies in the twofold meaning of the former word making it not a direct opposite of the latter word. “The Uncanny”, 195-6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 198 and 199.

something strange and eerie, according to Freud, adding gruesome fear to the etymological equation.⁷⁴ This suggests a relation between the home, and the space of the family, and hidden secrets from the past; something repressed in a place usually considered peaceful and secure. Freud uses an explanation from the German philosopher Schelling, to reach the following conclusion: “This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”⁷⁵ Freud states that “[m]any people experience the uncanny in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, as well as to the return of the dead, to spirits and ghosts.”⁷⁶ We think of death as purely gruesome and our relationship to it is problematic, says Freud, because of two things; firstly because of our emotional reaction to it, and secondly because it arouses the ultimate uncertainty due to our insufficient knowledge about it.⁷⁷ He states that our fear of the dead is a primitive fear meaning that it implies the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor, making the ghost a dangerous creature.⁷⁸ The emphasis on death and dead figures, as well as the correlation to the idea of the home, expressed in the word “unheimlich,” makes the haunted house a central trope for the uncanny.⁷⁹ For Daisy Connan, the term *uncanny* expresses above all this strange transformation of the home: “we could view the uncanny as a contamination of home, as a moment when we suddenly perceive the strangeness of familiar, previously comfortable environments.”⁸⁰ The home that becomes haunted illustrates how a place of security transforms into its opposite by becoming threatening and starts working against the human subject.

In terms of memory studies, the uncanny can be associated with the return of “unwanted” or problematic memories, and when compared to Freud’s frequently quoted text “Mourning and Melancholia” the uncanny can be conceptualised as an aesthetics expressing a

⁷⁴ Here Freud refers to an essay by Ernst Jentsch from 1906 that defines the uncanny as announcing intellectual uncertainty and therefore arousing fear. Ibid., 202.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 217.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 218.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 218.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 219. However, there are instances, for example fairy tales and myths, that tell stories of positive resuscitations or resurrections that do not have uncanny effect. Freud names Snow White and the New Testament examples, pointing towards how the resurrection per se is not perhaps what one finds uncanny but its circumstances, when one is not expecting it and not at all *hoping* for it. Context and viewpoint matter; the death of Snow White did not come about as the repression of something, the dwarfs do not want to forget about her, while the evil queen wants to: “What is *experienced* as uncanny is much more simply conditioned”, 224.

⁷⁹ “As we have seen some languages in use to-day can only render the German expression ‘an unheimlich house’ by ‘a haunted house’.” Ibid., 218.

⁸⁰ Daisy Connan, *Subjects Not-at-home*, 31.

very specific form of mourning.⁸¹ While mourning reflects a “healthy” process of grief, where the subject ultimately overcomes the loss, melancholia represents the opposite, a failure of that process, where the subject cannot overcome the loss and is therefore bound to be in a state of endless mourning, a melancholia which shares symptoms with what today is termed depression: “[T]he patient too cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost [...] Melancholia is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss.”⁸² The key idea in Freud’s conceptualisation is how the subject becomes melancholic because she cannot identify the loss. Perhaps because what is lost is abstract or because it happens unconsciously: “According to Freud, the melancholic response may be more likely to occur if the lost object lacks clear definition: if what is lost is something rather abstract, or if some part of the loss remains unconscious.”⁸³

Freud’s text has proven to be a seminal point of departure for contemporary scholars writing about societies in mourning in the aftermath of collective shock. The impact of Freud’s article is evident in *Panic and Mourning: The Cultural Work of Trauma*, a collection of articles where the editors define mourning in their introduction as follows: “Whereas panic tends to crop up during the experience of violent events, mourning, on the other hand, relates to the aftermath of a brutal disruption and to the way humans try to make sense of it retrospectively.”⁸⁴ The collapse of the banks was a moment of such “disruption,” even panic, followed by a period of mourning where people try to make sense of what happened. The authors of the articles in *Panic and Mourning* are post-Freudians in the sense that they use Freud’s text to think beyond the distinction of mourning versus melancholia. They are suspicious of the systematic “successful” progressive process of mourning, and have opted for melancholia as a more ethical way of compensating loss and remembrance.⁸⁵ The authors describe a “refusal to mourn” which they relate to academics such as Derrida, “who equates conventionalised mourning with an

⁸¹ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” (1917) trans. Michael Hulse, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin, 2005), 201-218.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 205.

⁸³ Anna Pekhoranta, “Negotiating Loss and Betrayal: Melancholic Ethics and Narrative Agency in Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone and Steer toward Rock*” in *Panic and Mourning: the Cultural Work of Trauma* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter GmbH, 2012), 69-84, 76.

⁸⁴ Agostinho, Daniela, Antz, Elisa, and Ferreira, Cátia, “Introduction” in *Panic and Mourning*, 1-24, 1.

⁸⁵ “Successful mourning, in Freud’s reasoning, implies ‘working through’ grief and liberating the subject from the lost object in order for it to find a new object of attachment. [...] However, contemporary critics have come to question the ethical and political desirability of mourning, in that it promotes forgetting, normative conciliation, and an abdication of responsibility. Melancholia, in turn, could emerge as resistance to the normative work of mourning, keeping the memory of the deceased alive and encouraging a critical and unsettling remembrance that does not comply with the conventionalised acceptance of loss and the containment of anxiety or the suppression of problematic memories in society” Agostinho, Antz, and Ferreira, “Introduction” in *Panic and Mourning*, 1-2.

unethical and politically troublesome forgetting of that lost,” expressing important connections between melancholia and spectrality.⁸⁶

While one can simply term this new idea of ethical mourning as melancholia, I would like to use the term *spectral mourning*, which indicates how the subject is haunted by the loss, and how, in the spirit of spectrality, he or she allows this haunting to take place, even *wants* it to take place. While melancholia is a state where one is stuck in constantly looking back to the past, spectrality emphasises the ghost as both a “revenant” and an “arrivant” – coming from the past as well as announcing what will come, indicating how the reading of the past affects the future: “studies of ghosts and haunting can do more than obsessively recall a fixed past; in an active, dynamic engagement, they may reveal more than the insufficiency of the present moment, as well as the disconsolations and erasures of the past, and a tentative hopefulness for future resolutions.”⁸⁷ The *return* of the repressed is what connects the uncanny and spectrality, and both concepts seek to reflect the circumstances of simultaneous absence and presence. However, what differentiates the two terms is how they call for different *reactions*. For the uncanny the ghost is essentially someone who once was familiar but has become strange and defamiliarised because he died and returned. The uncanny return creates fear within the subject, who above all is afraid of the ghost and wants to be rid of it. Spectrality also stresses that the ghost is originally someone familiar who returns, but in this instance not to arouse fear, but to be heard, because it returns with a message, calling for the more ethical act of human subjects to welcome its spectral presence. Spectrality theory points out how one should move beyond feelings of fear to attend to the ghost as a way to acknowledge contested issues from the past, memories that have for different reasons been repressed, forgotten or silenced. One should look the ghost in the eye and ask: why have you returned? This allows one to dwell with that question and *in* the spectral moment, aware of how acts in the present, impact the future. In the case studies analysed in this chapter, stories of hauntings and uncanny themes are interwoven with narratives of characters who are in mourning, suggesting an echo between the two, and raising questions about whether they concretise, contest or expand ideas on spectral mourning; do these texts present characters who are stuck in their melancholic state, constantly looking back, are inactive and static? Or do the narratives open up to the possibility of using this period of grief to work towards a better future, allowing the characters to explore their potential agency, to be

⁸⁶ Ibid., 2. Here the authors are referring to *Specters of Marx*.

⁸⁷ Peeren and del Pilar Blanco, “Introduction: Conceptualising Spectralities” in *Spectralities Reader*, 16. The editors discuss how for Freud the ghost is above all “gruesome” and how innovatively Derrida uses its metaphorical possibilities to conceptualise it as an “revenant” and “arrivant”, 13.

active in their reactions to hauntings, and therefore dynamic in their reception of past and in their experience of loss? These questions will guide the following analysis.

I Remember You: a Crash-horror in the time of economic crisis

In the wake of the banking crash, crime author Yrsa Sigurðardóttir changed her narrative form and started writing horror novels about hauntings and hidden secrets in post-economic crash settings: *Horfðu á mig* (2009, *Someone to watch over me*, 2013) was the first novel that announced this new direction, followed by *Ég man þig* (2010, *I Remember You*, 2012), *Brakið* (2011, *Silence of the Sea*, 2014), and *Kuldi* (2012, *The Undesired*, 2015).⁸⁸ These uncanny crime novels were among the most popular reading material during the financial crisis and turned the author into one of the major crime novelists in the country.⁸⁹ Sigurðardóttir was already an acclaimed crime writer whose contemporary realist crime and detective novels were popular with Icelandic readers as well as readers abroad, as her novels had at that point already been translated and published widely. *I Remember You*, the focus of the analysis here, is perhaps the most widely read of Sigurðardóttir's crime novels mentioned above, and the film adaptation premiered in 2017.⁹⁰ Even though one part of the narrative revolves around an unsolved crime and inexplicable murders, *I Remember You* is more of a horror and a gothic ghost story, with an emphasis on hauntings, ghosts and revenants who return to the world of the living with important messages from beyond the grave. Like the other ghost stories by Sigurðardóttir from the same period, references to the real events of the economic crisis are combined with uncanny themes, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and distress. In many of these works, the home, the domestic space of security and warmth, is under attack, which becomes symbolic in times of financial crisis when people fear they will lose their property and other basic life necessities.

The story represents hauntings with themes that can be defined both as being uncanny and spectral. While the descriptions of the environment become highly uncanny due to isolation and solitude, darkness and silence, and even though the characters are terrified of the spectre,

⁸⁸ Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, *Horfðu á mig* (Reykjavík: Veröld, 2009) English trans. Philip Roughton *Someone to Watch over Me*, 2013); *Ég man þig* (Reykjavík: Veröld, 2010) English trans. Philip Roughton *I Remember You*, 2012); *Brakið* (Reykjavík: Veröld, 2011) English trans. Victoria Cribb *Silence of the Sea* 2014; and *Kuldi*: (Reykjavík: Veröld, 2012) English trans. Victoria Cribb *The Undesired*, 2015.

⁸⁹ This news story tells how for the first time Arnaldur Indriðason, the leading crime writer in Iceland, lost the top seller spot to Yrsa: “Arnaldur missti toppsætið til Yrsu” *Vísir.is*, 8 December 2011. Available online: <https://www.visir.is/g/2011712089917> (accessed 15.6.2020) This news story from national radio and tv broadcast in Iceland, written in March, states that *I Remember You* is the number one bestseller in Iceland that year: “Ég man þig söluhæst”, *RÚV*, 16 March, 2011. Available online: <http://www.ruv.is/frett/eg-man-thig-soluhaest>. [accessed 15.6.2020]

⁹⁰ I mention the film adaptation in order to highlight the popularity of the book, but in the film adaptation the crisis aspect is diminished and the storyline extensively altered. The film is therefore not part of the analysis here.

echoing Freud's definition of the ghost as gruesome, it returns from death with important messages concerning justice, and encouraging living subjects to take responsibility for their deeds of the past. The hauntings of the narrative therefore have mostly to do with questions of guilt. Yet they also express a state of "spectral" mourning, where feelings of loss and grief are extended due to their ambiguous nature, when people do not entirely understand what it is exactly they mourn, and where feelings of grief become more complicated due to guilt and shame. These stories of mourning refer to the bigger context of the period, the crash that represented a collective shock, and the crisis, which became a period of collective *spectral* mourning. The aim of the analysis here is to focus on the haunting, how it is represented and how it is responded to, in order to examine how it relates to or embodies the character's process of mourning: what are the reasons behind the haunting and why are these characters haunted? In addition, how, precisely, do the hauntings relate to the financial crash: to the economic crisis, as well as to the mnemonic crisis of memory and identity? How do the characters react to the ghost and respond to their feelings of loss? Are they melancholic, nostalgic, constantly looking back to brighter and better times? Or do they use the potentiality of this spectral state of mourning to learn from the mistakes of the past in order to look towards the future?

I Remember You: two stories of hauntings in the wake of the Crash

I Remember You has two plotlines, two stories that are interwoven and converge in the end. One plot revolves around three characters, a married couple, Katrín and Garðar, and their female friend, Líf, who have purchased together and plan to repair an old abandoned house in a remote village called Hesteyri in Iceland's West Fjords. The couple are on the verge of bankruptcy due to the collapse of the Icelandic banks, the unemployment of the banker husband and their debts. The wife is an elementary school teacher and her wages are not enough to cover their loans and keep up their former lifestyle. The purchase of the house in Hesteyri is originally the husband's idea; he wants to renovate it into a guesthouse for hikers and tourists in the area. The renovations are therefore a way for him to get back into business, make money, in order to regain his former identity as a successful businessman. However, it appears as a rather desperate way of recovery considering that he has very limited knowledge of renovation work, and even less of the area in Hesteyri. Originally Garðar had bought the house with his best friend Einar, Líf's husband, who died suddenly, leaving the house project to the trio. Líf is also inexperienced when rebuilding old houses and the repairs seem to be a way of recovery from her loss. However, while Garðar grieves for his economic loss and former identity, Líf is in a state of

mourning for her deceased husband: “The fact that Líf was so keen to take on her husband’s role and press on with the repairs probably had something to do with the grieving process; she had neither skill nor interest in that kind of work, that much was certain.”⁹¹ The renovations take place during wintertime, as the owners want to be in business for the summer. An old sea captain sails with the trio out to Hesteyri, along with Putti, Líf’s little dog. The captain is surprised by how little they know about the place, and seems to be anxious about them staying there alone at this time of year. He tells them about the house they have just bought, how it goes under the name of “Final sight” and is overall very suspicious of it, suggesting that the abandoned house is in fact a classic haunted house. He also tells them how *isolated* the area is; there is no electricity, no phone reception, the next farm and town are both very far away, and in bad weather it is impossible to access the village by boat. They agree that he will come back for them in a week. They have not stayed in the house for long when they understand that they are not alone in the area. Initially they believe that a mentally disturbed child is terrorising them. As the narrative progresses it becomes clear that the disturbed child is a hostile ghost who seems to have returned for revenge, destroying all their plans of restoring their finances and recovering their losses. Katrín is the focal point of this plotline of the story and transmits the story to the reader who sympathises with her position. As the story develops, she becomes a victim to the plans of her husband and friend, who turn out to be lovers and have planned to kill Katrín in this remote area, and make it look like an accident to claim her life insurance. This implies that the ghost might be a “good” ghost, who sympathises with Katrín, as some of the messages that he leaves around are to be read as warnings aimed at her. However, at one point towards the end, when Garðar has disappeared without trace, the ghost comes for the two women, killing Katrín and causing Líf severe injuries. At the end of the story, Líf is saved by the police and taken back to civilisation, only to die from her injuries a couple of hours later. The rescue squad does not find Katrín’s remains, and the final paragraph of the story describes how she has herself become a spectral subject, a ghost that stays on in the house in Hesteyri. At that point, the reader gets a brief chance to look at the story world from a spectral viewpoint, following Katrín’s ghostly focal point.

The other plotline tells the story of Freyr, a divorced psychiatrist who has recently moved to Ísafjörður, the biggest town in the West Fjords and not far away from Hesteyri. His recent divorce and move seem to be his reaction to the loss of his son, Benni, who disappeared

⁹¹ Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, *I Remember You*, trans. Philip Roughton (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012), Kindle edition, 4. From here on I will refer to the novel in main text with page number in brackets.

without a trace three years earlier. The disappearance has left Benni's parents, Freyr and his ex-wife Sara, in a melancholic state, echoing directly ideas on spectral mourning; as they have not had the chance to formally say goodbye to their son by burying his remains, the memory of him and his whereabouts continue to haunt them, making it impossible for them to grieve him properly and overcome their feelings of loss. Furthermore, their reactions to the "spectral" state of their son are strikingly different; while Freyr has sought to repress the memory of his son and his disappearance, Sara seems to have opted for alternative methods to find out about Benni, by consulting a psychic. However, when the haunting memory of Benni takes on a direct form, and Freyr starts seeing his son and hearing him speak, he is forced to look back and face the past. Freyr is also dealing with a different kind of haunting, which forms the central plot for the crime story in *I Remember You*. As a psychiatrist working at the hospital in Ísafjörður, he is asked to help the police in town, to investigate very disturbing crime scenes and suspicious deaths. As the story and Freyr's investigation develops, he is led to believe that the victims' deaths are all related to the hauntings of a hostile ghost. The hauntings turn out to be a classic gothic form of "repressed-matters-returned," rooted in the disappearance of a little schoolboy sixty years earlier. The boy went missing when bullied by his schoolmates. He hid in a boat that took him to Hesteyri, where he eventually died in the basement of the same house that is purchased by the trio in the story. The boy returns for revenge; killing his schoolmates who not only bullied him but prevented him from being found, as they did not tell anyone about his whereabouts. The ghost also returns to haunt Katrín, Garðar and Líf, who have bought his house. Along with his friend from the police, Dagný, Freyr finds out about the origins of the boy, named Bernódus, as well as about the whereabouts of his son, who quite by chance turns out to be in Hesteyri. The son, Benni, had gone missing when playing hide and seek with his friends. He turns out to have hidden in a septic tank that was located on a trailer in the parking lot next to a petrol station in the neighbourhood. Benni suffered from diabetes and must have had a seizure while in the tank and fallen into a coma. The man who owns the septic tank turns out to be the former owner of the haunted house. He returns to his car a little later and drives all the way to the house in Hesteyri where he buries the tank next to the house without knowing that Benni is inside.

At this point, it must be acknowledged how confusing and extreme the plot of *I Remember You* is, with the layering of multiple dramas such as violent deaths, grieving characters and haunted lives, that take place in different locations and at different times. This convoluted nature of the plot line can to a certain extent be explained by the form of the

narrative and how it relates to the gothic tradition, the ultimate genre of hauntings and ghosts which, as Richard Davenport-Hines states, contains “four hundred years of excess, horror, evil and ruin.”⁹² He elaborates: “Goths unfortunately seldom rank sanity or calm among the highest aesthetic achievements; nor do gothic’s millions of contemporary artistic consumers. They like carefully staged extremism, and vicarious or strictly ritualised experiences of the dreadful Other.”⁹³ In this sense, the excess of *I Remember You*, along with its other traits such as the “cruel hero-villain,” “cringing victim” and “a terrible place, some locale, hidden from public view,” make it into a gothic novel par excellence.⁹⁴ Davenport-Hines defines the gothic as an expression of “counter-enlightenment” as an emotional, aesthetic and philosophical counter-reaction towards the age of reason, prevalent in the eighteenth century, and towards a society built on hierarchy and regulation.⁹⁵ Gothic imagery, according to him, has to do with transgression against authority, and the central focus of “revival gothic” in the twentieth century is used to illustrate power relationships; to display economic authority, class control and superior status.⁹⁶ This relates strongly to how *I Remember You* responds to the crash and crisis situation, inter alia by addressing the identity problematics of the period through the interplay of its characters: where the husbands of the story become the dominant male characters who seek to repress the hauntings as well as their extended feelings of grief.

As a ghost story published in the wake of the crash, the novel’s spectral uncanny themes refer to that particular period in a symbolic manner, yet they are framed with direct references to the events of crash and crisis. The allusions to the crash are perhaps more evident in the story of the trio, where it becomes a plot device: a desperation that has driven the characters to buy a haunted house in an uncanny isolated area that is completely unknown to them. The crash also creates an imbalance of power hierarchies between the characters’ identity and class. Garðar lost his job, wealth and identity as a successful banker in the crash. Katrín suffers because her husband does: while her position as an elementary school teacher was not affected directly by the crash, she becomes victim to her husband’s plan of killing her to benefit from her life insurance. Líf, however, is at the other end of the spectrum: her husband seems to have been a part of the banking elite who knew what was going to happen and secreted their assets in time.

⁹² This is actually the title of his book: Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* (New York: North Point Press, 1998).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8. Here Davenport-Hines refers to Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadoomasochism and the Culture of Gothic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

She is therefore not dealing with the same financial difficulties as her friends, but is, however, in a state of mourning her deceased husband and therefore echoing, symbolically, the state of the others who mourn their former life. Líf's state of mourning should, however, not be taken too seriously, as the reader gradually learns that she caused her husband's death. References to the crash in the story about Freyr appear more as anecdotes, and as part of the environment he lives in, such as this allusion to the radio: "The discussion on the radio seemed to be drawing to a close; the entire way over he'd been listening to a depressing interview with an economist who offered an extremely bleak outlook on the nation's financial state." (121) The pessimistic discussion on the radio somewhat echoes Freyr's own melancholic state of mind. He avoids listening to the radio, seeks to avoid thinking about his grief and loss, and is reluctant to take on the work of mourning in order to come to terms with the spectral memory of his deceased son.

I Remember You: *the haunted house*

While the hauntings take place in different locations in Hesteyri, the spectral presence of the ghost seems to be rooted in the house where the trio resides. The haunted house echoes Freud's statement on how repression transforms the home into an uncanny space, as it appears at first sight to be a "normal" house. There is nothing in the appearance of the house in Hesteyri that suggests that it is haunted. On the contrary, it seems to be a fairly ordinary house, which, on the other hand, has an uncomfortable aura to it: "Even the house, which was in every way a very charming old fashioned Icelandic wooden house, seemed oppressive [...] as it stood there silently, daring them to knock on the door." (372) At first, and before they actually see the ghost, the hauntings are displayed with sounds and smells. The classical eerie "creaks in the pine" express how the ghost makes its presence known with noises in the house's woodwork, as if someone were walking around. First the ghost appears as a shadow, highlighting his bodyless state as a spirit or spectre: "She saw something move quickly behind their white-clad friend. It was a pitch-black shadow, much darker than their dim surroundings. It disappeared as soon as it appeared, making it impossible for Katrín to distinguish what it was, but it looked a bit like a person, a short one." (15) In other scenes, the ghost is described as a dark silhouette (39). However, as the hauntings intensify, the ghost acquires a body, which makes them think that they are dealing with a living person and not a spectral creature. The messages the ghost leaves around, spelled out with shells, screams or whispers, are very different. At one point, Katrín can hear someone whispering "Run, Kata Run." (274), and at a different moment the

ghost screams “Don’t go, don’t go yet, I’m not finished” (191). The former message might be understood as a warning coming from a sympathetic ghost, considering that Katrín’s life is threatened by the other human subjects. The second message implies something different. Perhaps it means that the ghost is not done harming them, or that he is not done showing them something that allows them to identify him and understand why he returns to haunt the location.

The characters are not at all aware that they are being haunted by two ghosts, and nor is the reader, who believes that they are dealing with one hostile creature. Both ghosts turn out to be young boys who went missing, but at different times; Bernódus disappeared sixty years before while being bullied by his schoolmates, while the other, Benni, got lost playing hide and seek with his friends a few years before the story takes place. Bernódus was clearly an outsider in life, neglected by his father, bullied by his peers, and picked on by his teacher. His status as an “oppressed other” is highlighted by the fact that no one came for him while he became lost in Hesteyri. It is thus clear that he returns for two reasons. The first is revenge: to get even and kill the people who treated him badly in his life. This turns Bernódus into a hostile creature, a gruesome ghost, and therefore uncanny in the Freudian sense.⁹⁷ However, Bernódus also seems to return for a different reason, as his hauntings point towards his corpse in the basement, encouraging the human subjects to look beneath the surface, in the basement, and identify the body, that would eventually solve his case and uncertainty about his death. This makes Bernódus a spectral ghost in the Derridean sense, the ghost who returns with a message and seeks justice for matters that have been forgotten.⁹⁸ The ghost of Benni does not seem to return for revenge but haunts the house due to the uncertainty of his death that continues to haunt his parents. This makes Benni a friendlier, more passive ghost than Bernódus, who is not only aggressive and violent but also powerful, capable of entering the locked house, moving between different places in the country to kill his victims, as well as entering their minds and dreams. He is also able to affect electrical appliances and can dry out batteries. In the final haunting scene, readers come to understand the presence of the two ghosts, and how one of them is not capable of entering the house: “She recoiled in horror, feeling hope drain away, for outside stood a boy who didn’t seem to be the same one as they had seen before. This one, who was smaller, stared in with glazed eyes, his greyish face infinitely sad.” (361) However, Katrín is

⁹⁷ See the quotation from Freud above about the return of dead and the gruesome feeling, “The Uncanny”, 218.

⁹⁸ See the quotation from Derrida above: “So it would be necessary [...] to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without the commerce of ghosts. [...] And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance of generations.” Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 15.

also scared of this ghost, and is convinced that he wants her dead, as his apparition leads her to believe that in this location, nowhere is safe: “Outside or inside. It didn’t matter. They were dead.” (361) Katrín’s reaction to the two ghosts is stuck in the uncanny gruesome feelings towards the return of the dead, as she seems not to be able to move beyond her feelings of fear, and ask herself why these two spectral beings have returned to precisely this place. Initially, *I Remember You* is a story about repression and what happens when multiple responsibilities are subdued and not dealt with. The novel thus mirrors the multiple dimensions of the crash in the Icelandic context by addressing the period’s economic problems as well as the identity politics of the time. The economic crisis sets the stage for a juicy crime story implying how financial troubles can drive people to desperation and provoke them to commit dark deeds. The mnemonic crisis, on the other hand, is addressed allegorically through the interplay of the characters, and in the dynamic of struggle between their different identities. Analysing the different reactions of the characters towards the spectral presence helps to understand the significance of the hauntings for the narrative, as well as for the broader context.

Reactions and agency: why does the ghost return?

While the uncanny focuses on how ghosts frighten humans because of their gruesome uncanny nature, and Freud seeks to analyse the reason behind those fears, the spectral emphasises the importance of *agency*; both for the ghost, what it is capable of and what not, and not least for the human subject who is haunted by the ghost: how the living react to haunting. The spectral emphasis stresses how living human subjects should approach the ghost as a friendly figure, who returns for a reason, and how it is their responsibility to discover these reasons. It is therefore worthwhile to see if this applies to the three characters in the story in Hesteyri, and to analyse their reaction. Let us start with Katrín, the main character and focal point of the story, who provides the reader’s access to the story world. She appears as the innocent, passive character, who, to a certain extent, sympathises with the ghost, or the “deranged child” as she believes it to be, and is quick to accept the haunting, though without trying to understand the reasons behind the ghostly return. Katrín is passive because, even though she does not agree with her husband’s plans, she allows him to bring her to Hesteyri, to the impossible project of repairing a haunted house. She does not even protest, because she is afraid that she will hurt her husband, who is already devastated due to his unemployment and crisis, which is in part an identity crisis, since he lost his status as a successful banker, and is trying to restore his pride. At one point Katrín refers to the house as Garðar’s dream that she does not want to ruin with

any “silliness” (40), as she calls the hauntings. Katrín therefore passively accepts going to Hesteyri to support her husband and “not rock the boat” during challenging times. When the hauntings occur, Katrín sympathises with the ghost since she believes it to be a deranged and abandoned child. Being a children’s teacher, it is her duty to empathise with children, no matter how scary or strange they are. She is quick to accept the hauntings, and instead of fighting back, she calmly waits for what is to come. Katrín’s passivity turns her into an ideal post-crisis political subject but also raises questions: why is she so submissive, and what does this passiveness and absence of agency, the reluctance to react, and letting others control, symbolise in a larger context?

Katrín’s behaviour can to an extent be explained by her marriage, and how she, above all, wants to please her husband, thus shifting the focus to him and his reaction. It was Garðar’s idea to repair the house and bring them to Hesteyri to begin with, but he is also in complete denial: both in terms of the ghost as well as about their desperate economic situation. His reluctance to face the situation is perhaps due to his bad conscience. He represses the problems facing him, because that helps him to avoid admitting his guilt: that he is betraying his wife, not only by cheating on her, but is also planning to kill her for her life insurance.⁹⁹ The house project is therefore a decoy for Garðar, even though it is also a way to restore his identity and become a successful businessman again. Katrín, however, believes it to be a desperate way to recuperate his losses, as he has been unemployed for eight months when they go to Hesteyri, and desires deeply to get back to work. At one point, Katrín describes how their family pitied them because of his unemployment, emphasising how the economic loss has also to do with pride and shame. For Garðar, the house becomes a symbol of the dream of a better future, and he is not willing to allow some silly ghost to destroy that dream.¹⁰⁰ So, by denying the existence of the ghost, Garðar thinks it will disappear and go away. When the women mention how the creaks in the woodwork indicate that there is something *wrong* with the house, Garðar states that the only thing “wrong” with the house is maintenance, adding “which is why we are here” (57). At one point, he even blames the dog for the hauntings; the animal seems to be hypersensitive to the spectral presence: “you can bet your life that what’s really freaking us out is this bloody dog. If he’d just shut up we wouldn’t be reacting like this.” (185) When they discover that the phone batteries have suddenly and for no obvious reason died, Garðar says that he cannot deal with that right now: “[’]I’ve got to pretend this thing with the phones isn’t

⁹⁹ “Garðar wouldn’t have been better off with her dead ... then she remembered their life insurance.” (359)

¹⁰⁰ When the trio think they are dealing with a disturbed child and not a ghost, Garðar, unlike Katrín, shows no empathy, as he describes it as “strange” and hopes it will “perish in the storm” outside the house. (139)

happening.’ He looked at Líf, and then at Katrín, who recognised this reaction all too well; he couldn’t cope with this sort of crisis at all.” (164) Here, Katrín makes the connection between the situation in Hesteyri, and the crisis of the period, without knowing how deeply desperate Garðar’s way to recover his losses actually is.

The story of Garðar, his unemployment, repression and desperate ways to regain his pride, refers directly to the identity problematics caused by the crash and crisis. His character represents the pre-crash banking greed and the contemporary fall of twenty-first-century global capitalism. However, and more precisely, it also symbolises the downfall of the masculine hero so prevalent in the construction of national identity in Iceland and expressed in the image of the business Viking during the pre-crash boom years. The novel challenges this narrative of masculine heroism by drawing out the weaknesses and flaws in Garðar’s character: emphasising his desire and need for repression, as well as by turning him into an amoral criminal or villain who is planning to commit murder. The character of Garðar thus becomes a symbol of the dominant cultural group in Icelandic society, the patriarchy, whose agents seek to repress the crash, its causes and effects, in order to deny and erase their own responsibility and guilt. This is expressed through the relationship between Garðar and his wife, Katrín, who becomes his subordinate, and is pressed to follow his ways and decisions even though she does not approve of them. Garðar actively represses his wife, her warnings and words of caution, even as he knows that she speaks the truth about their critical situation. The marriage of Garðar and Katrín becomes a symbol for a power relationship, where the male violently takes the dominant lead and represses certain traits, such as sorrow, grief, mourning and regret. Garðar is in denial towards his feelings of grief, while Katrín mourns their former life. However, because of her husband, she is unable to explore the potential of the “spectral” mourning: to use the present moment to reflect critically on the past and work towards a better future.

The third character, Líf, is very hostile in her reaction towards the ghost, as she opts for exorcism to be rid of the ghost by wanting to kill the disturbed child, and above all to leave the uncanny location, no matter what: “Just imagine if we could find the little bastard, tie him up and finally have some peace. Maybe we get to kill him, since he obviously killed the man who used to own the house.” (187) Líf proves to be an example of an extreme individualist, devoid of all empathy, as she continuously suggests that it is not her job to deal with other “people’s problems,” as it is not her role to pay the debts of others. When Katrín finds out about her affair with Garðar, she also learns that Líf would never marry him, because she does not want to marry his debts. (359) This attitude responds to her amoral nature, and as the story develops,

the reader learns that she is not only having an affair with Garðar, but that she also plans to help him kill Katrín, just as she killed her husband. The half-hearted statement in the beginning about the project being a way for Líf to ease the pain of mourning is put into question when it is revealed later in the story that Líf in fact caused her husband's death. Her state of mourning should therefore not be taken too seriously, as the reason for her participation in the house project prove to be of different kind. She even admits this to Katrín that she is not mourning for her husband, but "mourning for what had been" (210), which echoes Garðar's and Katrín's feelings of loss, and how they mourn their former life before the collapse of the banks, as well as how they do so nostalgically and not reflectively, by wanting to turn back to that time-space without using the crash to learn from the mistakes of the past. Later, towards the end, Líf starts pondering culpability and punishment, as if the ghost had returned to avenge the murder of Einar: "do you think if someone does something bad, they always get punished for it?" (326) While Garðar represses his feelings of guilt, and his bad conscience, Líf seems to be dealing with the absence of conscience, and does not admit her wrongdoings until she is threatened by a hostile creature.

At one moment close to the end of the novel, the ghost encourages Katrín and Líf to look in the basement, where they find human bones (370). This clarifies the reasons for the hauntings: he wants his dead body to be found in order to settle his case so justice can be done. The hauntings also point to how the house was formerly a place of melancholic mourning, where tragic memories persisted, ruining the lives of the inhabitants, Bernódus and his father. Benni's hauntings have similar causes: to connect his disappearance with the location, highlighting how his disappeared body is to be found there. At the same moment as they find out about the dead body in the basement, Katrín discovers Garðar's and Líf's affair: she uses Líf's camera to take photos of the basement, and when looking through the photos she accidentally comes across images of them together, of Garðar naked sleeping in Líf's arms. This leads to a reckoning between the two women, where Líf tells Katrín the truth about their plans to bring her to the remote isolated area to kill her and make it look like an accident. At first Katrín does not understand why her loving husband would kill her, but when she thinks about their life insurance, she comes to understand that the house was, at least partially, a decoy for the true way Garðar intends to restore his finances. The story of the two boy-ghosts, as well as of the trio, draws out how the haunted house essentially becomes a symbol for a dark, pessimistic and melancholic (in the traditional sense of the word) attitude towards the future. Instead of allowing the hauntings to encourage them to use the spectral moment for reflection,

and for critically looking back, using the crash to learn and examine what went wrong in Icelandic society in the years leading up to the crash, the trio expresses a desire to go back to what was, instead of progressively moving towards a better future. This suggests a form of melancholic mourning in the sense of a “bad” pathological nostalgia: a nostalgia that drives them to desperation, panic and the commission of terrible deeds. As Svetlana Boym’s conceptualisation of the term *nostalgia* shows it is anything but simple. She further distinguishes between two forms of nostalgia, restorative and reflective. The former is applicable here by expressing the longing to go back to what was, whereas the latter term describes a more constructive form of nostalgia as a critical approach towards the past. Reflective nostalgia therefore shares similarities with new conceptualisations of melancholia and my idea of spectral mourning.¹⁰¹

The characters have known each other for a long time, as they all went to school together. Katrín describes how Garðar, Líf and Einar were a group of friends, “the cool kids,” and how she was not a part of the gang. In very simplistic terms, the trio represents the different groups in society during crash and crisis: Líf is part of the amoral elite, the privileged ones who do not have to think about finances in order to survive. Garðar is a greedy banker, and perhaps one of those who “caused” the economic collapse, and Katrín is the passive public, who did not participate directly in the financial expansion but suffered from the results, and accepts these by staying passive as this following quote expresses:

They were a whisker away from going bankrupt; all the money Garðar had scraped together from securities trading had vanished in the form of worthless stock, leaving behind nothing but debts. In fact they were technically bankrupt, but the banking system kept them afloat thanks to some tricks Katrín didn’t completely understand and left Garðar to deal with. But these solutions were only superficial; the clock was clearly ticking, and soon the life raft would be set adrift.
(63)

Here the question of responsibility arises, and the two ghosts, Bernódus and Benni, seem to have two symbolic functions in this regard. The convoluted nature of the plot, the excess, multiple ghosts and hauntings, as well as the fact that the house in Hesteyri is haunted by two ghosts, illustrates the multiple levels of responsibility and guilt for the financial crisis: the

¹⁰¹ See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

economic in the fact that the nation became almost bankrupt, as well as the mnemonic in the sense that the crash also brought down the collective national ideal in the form of the business Viking. The latter expresses the problematics of national identity construction embedded in Icelandic history, which is repressed, and thus keeps on returning to haunt. This mechanism of repression brings us to the second symbolic function of the ghosts: the historical distance between the two boy-ghosts which creates the historical long view of the novel. Here the death and forgetting of Bernóðus implies how repression works: how repressed matters are bound to return, indicating how the memory of Benni is also bound to haunt if his case is not resolved and the guilt and responsibility concerning his disappearance and death are not admitted. Garðar is thus “guilty” in a double sense, not only of the couple’s economic stress and for betraying his wife, but also because, even though the society has gone through a severe breakdown, he is still supporting the idea of the dominant masculine hero. Katrín, in her passivity, becomes partially responsible by not taking action. Líf did not cause the crash, but her husband grew rich during the expansion, and she benefits from that, without having any feelings of remorse, nor being ready to assist her less fortunate fellow man. And it ends badly for all of them; Garðar disappears, Líf dies, and Katrín returns as a spectral subject to the house in Hesteyri. Her anger implies how she returns as a more *active* subject, looking for revenge, or rather, seeking justice, by haunting those who are guilty, who have something bad on their conscience, and should face the responsibility of their actions in the past. Here Katrín’s feelings echo the views expressed by many protesters in the aftermath of the crash.

Hauntings in Ísafjörður: three different types of spectral presence

As in the story of Hesteyri, it is possible to distinguish between three different types of ghostly returns in the story about the psychiatrist Freyr and of the hauntings in Ísafjörður. The first type of hauntings forms the central plot for the crime story, where the hostile ghost returns to kill his enemies from beyond the grave. These scenes are communicated in retrospect. The second type of haunting is more direct, experienced by the main character and focal point, Freyr. These hauntings relate to the crimes in the story, but also to the psychiatrist’s personal mourning, and his grief for his disappeared son. Which brings us to the third type of haunting, the more *symbolic* form of haunting as *spectral* mourning, illustrating how Freyr, and his former wife Sara, are haunted by the memory of their disappeared son, and how they respond to the hauntings and their feelings of loss. As in the case of the trio in Hesteyri, the hauntings in the story about Freyr are also inflected with questions of responsibility, suggesting how he

represses his memories due to his feelings of guilt. This refers directly, yet symbolically, to the broader context of the period of crisis as being a period of collective mourning, which becomes melancholic and spectral, and in some sense complicated, considering that no one seems to be ready to take the blame and accept responsibility for what caused the crash to begin with.

The murders in the story seem at first to have nothing to do with the return of a ghost, but as the narrative progresses, and Freyr's investigation advances, they turn out to be caused by the haunting of a hostile creature. The story about Freyr opens with the description of a *chaotic* crime scene in a kindergarten: "Freyr stuck his hands in his pockets and stared at the destruction in front of him once more. Tattered teddy bears and rag dolls were strewn across the floor, the limbs torn from most of them and the eyes pulled out." (16) In addition, someone has written "dirty" on the walls of the playrooms. The scene in the kindergarten turns out to refer back to an incident in the elementary school in Ísafjörður, sixty years before, when the classrooms of the school were destroyed and the words "dirty" and "ugly" written on the walls. The ghost also scratched the heads of several students in a school photo, who later became his victims. These scenes of vandalism are therefore related to the inexplicable suspicious deaths, where the ghost turns out to be the killer; his hauntings have either driven the victims to commit suicide or led to bizarre accidents. Freyr helps the police, for example, investigate a suicide committed by a woman in her sixties at the church in Súðavík, a small town close to Ísafjörður. He later links that incident to the death of a woman who lived in his apartment before him, and died suddenly when she fell on her garden shears in the back garden. Úrsúla, one of Freyr's patients, is possessed by a memory from the past, and has spent most of her life in what seems to be a constant psychosis and in institutions. Later the reader understands that she is haunted by Bernódus, who thinks she was also responsible for his disappearance. Úrsúla was friends with Bernódus, but the others who bullied him tried to disrupt their friendship. Úrsúla saw when the boy hid in the boat and could therefore have let others know about his whereabouts. Instead, she decided to stay silent and that decision causes the haunting, and therefore her suffering: "Her eyes opened and she looked at Freyr. The fear in her face was tangible, a sick hunger that had etched out a new, yet terrifying reality in which she was trapped. As if the true one weren't bad enough. 'Bernódus.' Tears ran down her cheeks. 'He's waiting for me outside.' She wiped her tears with her bony hand. 'He's angry at me. So angry.'" (265) In these crime-haunting cases, all of the victims have something on their conscience, a guilt that they have silenced and repressed. In this sense, the hauntings of the ghost have to do with responsibility, as it tries to induce the living subjects to face their culpability, their dark secrets of the past, for justice to

be done. As in the story of *Hesteyri*, the multiple scenes of haunting refer to the multiple levels of responsibility and repression in Icelandic crash-society. The hauntings in the story are rooted in the witnessed crime of the victims and their guilt, which refers to the historical guilt of the period and the greed of post-crash society.

While, in the case of the crimes scenes and Úrsúla's illness, Freyr learns about hauntings from others, he himself also experiences hauntings directly, in his home, his workplace, the hospital, as well as outside, down by the harbour, where he experiences a terrifying encounter with a ghost that becomes a turning point in his process of mourning. Freyr is haunted by the ghost of his son Benni. The first incident takes place at the hospital, as the door to his office keeps opening, without anyone being there. At one point, Freyr calls hello and receives an eerie answer: "A chill passed over him when a familiar voice whispered in response to his call. A voice that had always been lively, contended and joyful, but that now sounded cold and lifeless. A voice that seemed so near, yet at the same time, so infinitely far away, 'Daddy'" (130) A little later he even sees the ghost of Benni: "When he'd finally forced himself to look into the corridor the night before, he'd seen his son running away, in the same clothing as he'd worn on the day he disappeared, and exactly the same height." (145) At first Freyr thinks that the haunting is a sign of mental illness, that he is losing it, like some of his patients: "it was clear to him that he was losing his grip on reality; in fact he already had, according to all the traditional definitions that he applied to his patients. He'd heard voices and seen things, had lost all connection to his real surroundings, as he'd always feared would happen." (145) Freyr also finds out that he is living in a "haunted" house. He describes how he had not thought much about the apartment, provided by the hospital, before knowing the identity of the woman who lived there before him. She turns out to be one of the victims of the hostile ghost, and is the one who was killed in her back garden. The spot where the woman died seems also to be haunted: "he'd experienced an uneasiness he could not explain. In retrospect, he'd felt as if silence and darkness dwelt at the roots of the bush." (196) Strange odours and sounds come from the spot, and Freyr can also hear sounds coming from the basement, where he finds the woman's dream diaries and learns about how the ghost of Bernódus haunted her in her dreams.

Like the trio in *Hesteyri*, Freyr is haunted by two different ghosts, yet again indicating the multiple levels of responsibility and repression. As before, they turn out to have different impact as they seek to convey different messages. While Benni approaches his father quietly, and whispers his messages, Bernódus plays dirty tricks on him, laughs and teases, which terrifies Freyr. He therefore makes a distinction between the two ghosts, believing that one of

them is “good” and the other “evil.” His son appears as a passive ghost, and non-harmful: “If the unbelievable proved to be true and Benni’s spirit was haunting him, that could only be good. Benni was his child, no matter whether he was alive or dead.” (319) Bernóðus, on the other hand, is an aggressive ghost and possibly dangerous: “Again he heard suppressed laughter, now more clearly. It sounded desolate originating in malice or pleasure over other’s failures. Even though Freyr could never have described Benni’s laughter, could not even recall it in his mind, he knew that this was not his son. In his short life, Benni had never made such a spiteful sound.” (320) Bernóðus is a bitter and an angry ghost, whose anger encourages him to avenge violently the injustice he experienced in life, that led to his death. The reason for Benni’s return also has to do with responsibility, as he encourages his father to reckon with the past, and settle the problematic memories he has repressed, as his message suggests: “Tell the truth. Then you’ll find me Daddy.” (316) Freyr is however very reluctant to do so, as he does not really act until the terrifying encounter with Bernóðus’ ghost. At that moment, he finally understands the importance of looking back and coming clean. Even though he knows that this “evil” ghost is not his son, he associates the ghostly return with his disappearance, making him determined to go over every minor detail to solve the puzzle (324). Here, the ghost uses its anger to urge Freyr to face his responsibility, which he does in the end, but only partially.

Hauntings in Ísafjörður: spectral mourning as haunting

The third type of haunting in the story about Freyr is a more symbolic form of a “spectral presence,” experienced by Freyr and his wife, Sara, who mourn their son who disappeared and was never found. They react very differently to this state of endless grief: while Freyr seems to be in some sort of denial, repressing his difficult memories, Sara has looked to alternative spiritual methods in order to communicate with the deceased son. She is in contact with a psychic, who explains to both Sara and Freyr the situation of spectral mourning explicitly:

‘When people die without coming to terms with their end, they get trapped between worlds. They can’t move on to the next level of existence, because the ones they leave behind are still too connected to them and want justice to be done, or for reckoning to take place. If that doesn’t happen, these wayward souls try to find a way to tell their loved ones what happened, but that’s not always achievable – often they can’t manage to make a connection with the living. This stage is most evident while family members or close friends of the deceased are

still alive, and more often than not the dead give up when there's no one left with an interest in resolving the matter. The soul can get stuck in limbo, its demand for justice turns into an obsession and that's when you get hauntings in old houses and cemeteries.' (243)

In this scene, the medium hands us a key to analysing the haunting, and its significance for the narrative: the ghost of Benni returns because he wants to encourage his living parents to solve his case, the uncertainty of his death, as well as to accept responsibility. Missing person cases have been addressed from the viewpoint of hauntology, where the missing person is referred to as a *living ghost*, since he or she is invisible to others while it is not possible to confirm him or her as being deceased.¹⁰² The questions and doubts that follow a disappearance can take the form of haunting, where the fate of the deceased person will not leave those left behind in peace. The medium goes on to explain how even the purest of souls can turn into hostile creatures and ghosts if they become stuck in this spectral state between life and death for too long, and if nothing is done. Here she explains the difference between Bernódus and Benni as ghosts, as well as making it urgent for Freyr to clarify the uncertainty of Benni's death and prevent his spectral state and haunting: "Find him. Solve the puzzle of what actually happened to him and bury him with his relatives. Free him from the torment of knowing his mother is living in a hell of uncertainty, and you as well." (244) This emphasis on burial is echoed throughout the narrative, stressing how, in Western culture, entombment in consecrated ground creates closure in the process of death. It is also a key to a normal and "successful" process of grief; allowing those who remain to say their final goodbye, and to fully understand that the deceased has now left the realm of life once and for all. Benni's parents will therefore not be at peace until his bones are found and they can safely lay him to rest six feet under. Coming back to the theoretical ideas discussed in the section about melancholia and spectral mourning, critics question the ethics of this closure, and Derrida, for example, wants us to allow the memory of the deceased to persist, by means of haunting or spectral presence. The finalisation implied suggests the mechanism of repression, instead of allowing the spectral moment to be used for critical reflection on the past to work towards a better and more just future.

When listening to the words of the medium, Freyr is not ready to buy into the spiritual explanations, but as a psychiatrist he admits that people can be haunted by *memories* and, in

¹⁰² See Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and The Agency of Invisibility* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

particular, difficult and tricky memories, such as trauma. As he explains to Sara: “if you dream about Benni, think you can see him and so on, it’s perfectly natural and doesn’t have to have any psychic meaning. You must believe me, these things are more common than you think. Your mind is still tied to him, and because he’s always uppermost in your thoughts he’ll keep appearing like this for a long time to come.” (260) The hauntings, and the apparitions of Benni’s ghost, demonstrate how the mind plays tricks on them, due to a memory that is conflicted and has therefore not been processed or accepted. For Freyr that is a “normal” psychological reaction to loss and an example of a mnemonic disruption, causing his melancholic state of mind. To a certain extent, Freyr’s conceptualisation of a memory that haunts, causing the grieving subject a state of depression, echoes Abraham’s and Torok’s ideas on “incorporation” which creates a “crypt” within the mind of the grieving subject.¹⁰³ The crypt becomes a storage place for repressed memories that the subject is unable or unwilling to process.¹⁰⁴

Freyr describes himself as “too broken and burned to make a connection” to any person (18) and explains why he left Sara, as her obsession with Benni constantly “reopened the poorly healed wounds in his heart”: “Had he not made the decision to leave her, he would have most likely ended up with drinking himself to death or destroying himself by some other means” (42-3) Here Freyr draws similarities between himself and Bernódu’s father, who became severely destructive in his melancholic mourning that turned into a mental illness, addiction, negligence and abuse. Freyr’s decision to leave Sara becomes a token for his desire for repression and the need to be left alone, in isolation and solitude: “All he wanted was to be able to go through the grieving process on his own terms, without constant interference from the delirium that gripped Sara.” (43) While he tries to keep up appearances during daytime, repressing his problems in order to survive and continue with his life, they come creeping up on him when night falls, as he explains how the following questions keep haunting him every night: “How could a six-year-old boy vanish without trace in broad daylight? Where was he? Why couldn’t he be found?” (43) At the same time, and even though it appears as contradictory, Freyr seems to

¹⁰³ See Abraham and Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*; Abraham and Torok, “‘The Lost Object – Me’ : Notes on Endocryptic identification,”; And Torok, “The Illness of Mourning and The Fantasy of The Exquisite Corpse,” in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, Vol.1, trans. and ed. Nicholas T. Rand, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁴ When our loved ones die, according to Abraham and Torok, we keep an image of them internally in our minds, which helps in the process of grieving them. For Abraham and Torok, this is a form of introjection. Incorporation, on the other hand, happens when one cannot “settle” the introjection and it takes over the unconscious, making the mind constantly tied to the dead other. Maria Yassa explains this explicitly: “Where mourning, i.e., the work of introjection, leads to independence from the object, incorporation works in the opposite direction: in this case, dependence on the dead object is crippling, since the dead object disposes of and commands the subject’s drives. This identification is termed endocryptic, given the secrecy of the bond.” “Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok—the inner crypt“, *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 25:2, 2002, 82-91, 88.

desire the haunting of his son, as a way to allow his memory to persist. When waking up one day, unable to picture Benni's face, he fills his apartment with photos of him: "The face was always just out of reach, just on the verge of appearing, but needing one last effort to recall it. The framed photos were intended for such moments, but Freyr had immediately realised that they would constantly increase in number, and in the end his inability to picture his son would become inescapable." (97) Here Freyr seems to fear forgetting as a form of involuntary power that takes over the mind, making memories fall into oblivion without subjects having any control in that mechanism. His way of actively repressing the memories of the loss appears as a way to take control over this memory mechanism and as a way to hide something from the past. This contradiction, of repressing the memories as well as longing for them, suggests that Freyr is hiding something that prevents him from settling the past, to be at peace with himself.

Sara seems to be suffering even more than Freyr, as she has not been able to go back to her work since the disappearance of her son. While Freyr describes his state of mourning as "creeping uncomfortably closer to the precipice" he states that Sara "had already plunged off" the cliff: "Freyr had had enormous trouble accepting the most reasonable yet most unbearable conclusion – that Benni was dead. His ex-wife Sara was still struggling to accept their child's fate, and was slowly but surely sinking deeper into a psychological quagmire." (100) The overbearing feelings of loss and grief seem to isolate Sara, preventing her from connecting with other people: "Sara felt that other people's sympathy was superficial, that no one could put themselves in her shoes and understand her feelings. Freyr was of a different opinion. For him, you didn't need to go through hell yourself in order to sympathize with those who ended up there." (101) Freyr describes how Sara stopped eating when Benni disappeared, and had "wasted away," and how they had completely stopped having sex. This indicates how Sara, in her deep state of melancholic mourning, becomes depressed and loses the will to live, or at least the will to lead a healthy and happy life, evoking the image of a "living dead." The spectre of Benni seems to have this effect on her, as she seems to be constantly haunted by him: "I'm still having the same dreams and I'm still haunted by the same feelings. She took a deep breath before continuing: 'I can *smell* Benni sometimes. I see him at the shops, outside the apartment, everywhere I go. I'm not hallucinating Freyr, he's still here. You've got to realize that.'" (259) Freyr tries to diminish these feelings of haunting by having Sara move out of their house. Later, he learns that she plans on moving back to the neighbourhood in order, he suspects, to keep looking for Benni. (121)

Freyr's reaction to the haunting is therefore repression: he avoids talking about his son with his former wife, which leads to their divorce, moves far away from everything that reminds him of his former family life, and actively prevents himself from thinking about the son's whereabouts: "[he] always packed it away carefully in a suitable place somewhere in his head before turning to other things, usually long before obsession managed to sow its seeds." (123) However, Sara's reaction, even though it appears desperate, is active, and implies communicating with the ghost, establishing a dialogue with it. Freyr goes on explaining how Sara was never good at repressing her thoughts, indicating how she is more prepared to react to the haunting instead of staying passive. However, when Benni starts appearing to his father and whispering messages to him, and after the terrifying encounter with the ghost of Bernódus, Freyr is driven to come clean (304). He admits to his wife that, right before Benni's disappearance, he had an affair with one of his patients – who turns out to be Líf, the amoral character from the story in Hesteyri. Freyr slowly finds out that Líf stole one of Benni's insulin pens, which she very likely used to kill her husband. Freyr comes to the conclusion that if he had not met Líf, but rather gone straight to see Benni, he would not have died, at least not from a diabetic seizure that probably prevented him from making himself known when hiding in the septic tank. However, Freyr seems not to be ready to take full responsibility for his mistakes, that might or might not have led to the disappearance of his son, as he blames the fault on his "evil" mistress Líf: "of course he bore the blame for their having been together, but he still felt hatred fasten its claws into him. If he hadn't met up with her after fetching the drug, Benni wouldn't have died. Not in that way. His hatred was primitive, like that which Adam and Eve must have felt for the serpent after they'd been driven from paradise." (380) Looking back and coming clean, at least to some extent, allows Freyr to "solve the puzzle" and discover his son's whereabouts; right next to the house in Hesteyri. By finding his bones, Freyr is able to *complete* Benni's death, allowing him to move on. It however does not seem to stop the haunting all together. The relationship between Freyr and Sara mirrors the relationship between Garðar and Katrín in the story of the haunted house in Hesteyri. In both cases, the husband becomes the dominant agent, in some sense the masculine hero who is, however, ridden with flaws and weaknesses, pointing towards the repressed guilt, which in the end, turns them both into villains of some sort. Like Garðar, Freyr represses the hauntings and denies any ghostly presence suggested by the alternative psychic methods his wife is drawn to. Here the repression of the hauntings follows the repression of traits such as feelings of sorrow and mourning which

prevent him for exploring the potentiality of spectral mourning as a process to work critically towards a better future.

Significance of the haunting for the narrative and broader context

I Remember You has a very open ending. Freyr seems to be at peace with himself when he has found Benni, and plans to buy the haunted house in Hesteyri, perhaps to be closer to the memory of his deceased son: “He thought of the house in Hesteyri watched by all the people who had drowned in the nearby fjord over the years. Maybe he could acquire it cheaply. The owners were either dead or gone, and it would give him something to think about; he could try to get it back into a decent state and maybe then the negative aura that seemed to surround it would disperse.” (390) This indicates how he allows the memory of the deceased son to persist, or rather to continue to haunt, but in a different form, as a lovingly cherished and positive memory. But he might, however, also experience a different kind of haunting in the house in Hesteyri, indicating that there are still cases that need to be solved, justice done, and responsibility claimed. Katrín, who is now herself a spectral subject, a ghost, and angry about her husband’s and friend’s betrayal as well as her own premature violent death, considers the house to be hers: “Nothing else mattered now except the anger that boiled deep inside her. This was her home and nothing would disturb her here again. She would make sure of it.” (391) This ending indicates how the haunting continues as a struggle between the living and the dead: how Freyr becomes the next victim of a hostile and angry ghost, reminding him of how he has not yet fully come clean and admitted his accountability. The hauntings signify questions of responsibility; if no one takes the blame, they will continue, as well as illustrating violently the mechanism of repression. Here Katrín becomes the representative of those who desire some kind of justice in the wake of the crash. However, the period of collective loss during the crisis goes also beyond economic concerns, indicating how the mourning persists and takes on a spectral form due to the loss of a collective ideal in the form of national identity. As discussed earlier, ideas of national memory built on heroism and superiority reached their high point during the boom years, and were crystallised in the idea of the business Viking, that came to a halt with the crash. This is expressed directly through the character of Garðar, who seeks to regain his identity after the crash by doing the same as he did before the crash; business and making money – whatever it takes. The fact that Garðar is punished for this attempt by the angry ghost indicates how the people of Iceland need to create a new ideal for themselves, and perhaps, to be more humble, critical and multivocal when envisioning a collective national identity. Only then can this period of spectral mourning come to an end. Coming back to the questions posed in the introduction

to this section, on how the novel responds to theoretical ideas on spectral mourning, it expresses a state of haunting as well as suggesting why the haunting persists. It does not, however, offer any solutions to the haunting that would allow for the expansion of spectral mourning, and a move beyond feelings of loss and mourning.

Hvítfeld: *uncanny family novel*

Hvítfeld: Fjölskyldusaga (Whitefur: A Family History) is a novel by the author Kristín Eiríksdóttir, published in 2012, four years after the collapse of the banks and in the midst of the financial crisis that followed the crash. *Hvítfeld* tells the story of Jenna Hvítfeld, a young Icelandic woman who gives the impression of being *perfect*; a former gymnastics champion who at the beginning of the story has settled in Texas to pursue what seems to be an outstanding career in physics. She is married to a wealthy husband, is the mother of one daughter, Jackie, and is training for a space launch for NASA. Jenna is the main protagonist of the story as well as its narrator, at least in the first part when the plotline revolves around her life in the United States. When Jenna's younger sister Eufemía dies unexpectedly, she returns to Iceland, and with that the story changes dramatically, becoming the story of Jenna's family, telling her sister's childhood story as well as that of her divorced parents, Magnús and Hulda. The secrets of the family members are slowly revealed as the narrative progresses and their hidden and repressed memories are exposed. *Hvítfeld* is an uncanny version of the traditional family novel that deconstructs the "homely" aspect of family life, allowing the "unhomely" to arise and emerge.

Hvítfeld is also an example of crash literature, by being a novel that is not only published during the post-crash period, but also discusses and refers to the events of the boom, crash and crisis on multiple levels. It addresses the events directly through the characters' dialogue and in descriptions or explanations of their circumstances. But it also refers more subtly and symbolically to the social condition generated by the crisis. *Hvítfeld* is not an uncanny story in the sense of being a horror story of hauntings and ghostly threats in the gothic tradition. In this sense, it conforms to a contemporary conceptualisation of the uncanny, as discussed by Daisy Connon in her book *Subjects not-at-home*: "While this literary term [the uncanny] has traditionally been associated with imagery of the fantastic, such as vampires, doubles, zombies and Gothic mansions, today the uncanny also qualifies as an unthematisable element in day-to-day life and in the subject's relationship to the most familiar environments: the home, the family

and the self.”¹⁰⁵ The uncanny nature of *Hvítfeld* is created within the realm of realist depictions of family life, where nonetheless there is always also something *tainted*, due to lies and repression. Space is one of the aspects in *Hvítfeld* that allows the uncanniness to arise, and the homes that are described in the novel are strange and “unhomely,” implying how they are actually hiding repressed memories, secrets or mysteries that are *out of sight* in the everyday space. This oddness of the domestic space relates directly to its inhabitants, their identities and sense of self, as Connon states: “situating their narratives primarily in the domain of the everyday and the family home, they each explore the notion of selfhood as it relates to these environments, interrogating the subject’s relationship to her familiar, domestic surroundings or to her family members.”¹⁰⁶ The family’s state of spectral mourning in *Hvítfeld* echoes the situation of the post-crash loss, suggesting how the novel approaches the collective through the particular. To be precise, how the family members’ acts of repression refer to the larger context outside the novel: where the crash of the economy and the financial crisis, as well as the mnemonic disruption, are symbolised with the collapse of the patriarchal family ideal. Reading *Hvítfeld* spectrally means examining *how* and *why* the characters are melancholic, by focusing on how the many years of generational repression have led to their melancholic state, which is expressed with their surroundings and *unhomely* homes.

Hvítfeld and the Crash: the falseness and collapse of the ideal

Hvítfeld has numerous direct references to the events of the economic expansion, crash and crisis, where the characters discuss the matters of the crash and its impact on their situation. Jenna, the main character and focal point of the story, discusses the events of the crash and crisis directly when explaining them to her daughter Jackie. The little girl asks her mother about this word *hrunið* (the crash) she keeps hearing about in Iceland, to which Jenna replies: “they mean when the economy crashed [...] Four years ago everyone thought they were extremely rich until they found out they weren’t. The banks and a lot of companies cleared out, people lost their jobs and savings, and many had to declare bankruptcy.”¹⁰⁷ Jackie asks if her grandparents are now poor and Jenna says: “Your grandmother didn’t own anything so she did

¹⁰⁵ Connon, *Subjects Not-at-home*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ “Þeir eiga við þegar efnahagskerfið hrundi, útskýri ég. Fyrir fjórum árum héldu allir að þeir væru ofboðslega ríkir en síðan komust þeir að því að svo var ekki. Bankarnir og fullt af fyrirtækjum fóru á hausinn, fólk missti vinnuna og ævisparnaðinn og margir neyddust til að lýsa sig gjaldþrota.” Kristín Eiríksdóttir, *Hvítfeld: Family History*, my translation, 49. From here on I will refer to the novel in footnotes with page number in brackets. All translations are mine.

not lose anything either. And she is a government employee so she kept her job. Your grandfather and Petra [his later wife] didn't lose anything because your great-grandfather warned them so they could hide away assets and savings just in time."¹⁰⁸ This quote explains clearly the different situations of different groups in Icelandic society at the time of the crash. While many lost their savings or houses, a small group seems to have known what was about to happen or covertly received information about the imminent economic crash. Yet others did not lose anything when the economy collapsed simply because they did not have any savings or assets. That does not, however, mean that the events did not economically harm them in any way, since the collapse had an impact on social life in general, with the rise of commodity prices and rent, and fewer job opportunities. Jenna's explanations locate her on the margins between the privileged elite, the paternal side of the family, and the common public to which the maternal side belongs.

The novel also describes how the economic crash harmed Jenna's relatives. An example is her cousin Lovísa, a journalist who seeks to reflect critically upon the events of the crash. After having lost her position at four big media outlets she establishes her own news website with a group of people, but nobody seems interested in reading it: "They wrote long news-pieces no one wanted to read, mainly extensive interviews with people who were accused of *exerting themselves against economic growth* and sometimes many pages about something that floated past in the Icelandic media."¹⁰⁹ Lovísa and others working on similar pieces are disregarded as being "fussy complainers," suggesting how reluctant people were to discuss critically the causes of the crash during the crisis. Somehow it seems to have been easier simply to collectively forget the events that led to the crash instead of facing the shame and discussing matters analytically. Interestingly, it is also Lovísa who is on the hunt for the truth of the family history, interrelating the two plotlines of the novel; the one about the crash of the economy and the other about the collapse of the family ideal. Lovísa describes the silence that governs the family's history: "Maybe there is something nobody wants to say out loud and maybe this something is the explanation. Our family is a little bit like an optical puzzle, like there is something missing from the picture."¹¹⁰ Lovísa is therefore a character who actively reacts;

¹⁰⁸ "Amma þín átti ekkert þannig að hún tapaði heldur engu. Svo er hún ríkisstarfsmaður þannig að hún hélt vinnunni. Afi þinn og Petra töpuðu engu vegna þess að langafi þinn varaði þau við svo að þau komu eignum sínum og sparnaði undan í tæka tíð.", 49.

¹⁰⁹ "Þau skrifuðu langar fréttaskýringar sem enginn nennti að lesa, aðallega ítarleg viðtöl við fólk sem sakað var um *að beita sér gegn hagvexti* og stundum margar blaðsíður um eitthvað sem annars flögraði hjá í íslenskum fjölmiðlum.", 108.

¹¹⁰ "Kannski er eitthvað sem enginn vill segja upphátt og kannski er þetta eitthvað skýringin. Fjölskyldan okkar er svolítið eins og felumynd, eins og eitthvað vanti í myndina.", 160.

looks back to the past critically, both on the social systemic level as well as on the personal level of family history.

The crash theme is also to be found more subtly in the theme and tone of the narrative, which are highly uncanny, since they gradually unveil lies and deception, and carefully expose constructed illusions. Progressively, the reader learns that the main protagonist, Jenna, is an extremely unreliable narrator and a compulsive liar who takes on fake identities. Jenna admits early in the story how she has lied to her family about her life in the United States. While she told her father that she was still studying physics at the University, and received financial support from him, she had in fact dropped out of school years ago. Jenna elaborates on this: “The family did not have to know about my situation. The adventure others followed from afar should be one of the few things one can decide for oneself.”¹¹¹ An even more excessive example is how Jenna creates an entirely fictional identity and lies in interviews with Icelandic magazines, by describing a glamorous yet fake life of how she spends time with the jetsetters of Hollywood as well as going through a strict preparation for journeys in space, while in fact she is struggling as a single mother. The moment of truth takes place at her sister’s funeral reception, when Jenna all of a sudden decides to break the silence and tell everyone that she was never training to become an astronaut, that she dropped out of university years ago, and that she divorced her husband because she was constantly cheating on him. She adds: “God bless America. What did you actually think? That I was telling you the truth? You are deranged, you are addicted to fiction, you live in lies... *we fooled ya’ll*, says Jackie and giggles.”¹¹²

When talking about the crash to her daughter Jackie, Jenna explains what many believe to be the main reasons behind the economic crash: lies and deception. Jackie asks why people would think they were rich when they were not. Jenna, when answering her daughter, draws similarities between the social condition of the period and her own personal behaviour. She states that people thought they were rich because “they were told a lie.”¹¹³ Here it is important to highlight the impersonal mode of the sentence which implies an absence of agency, *passivity*, and raises questions about who it actually was that *lied* to all these people. Jackie is taken by surprise by this explanation and becomes almost angry, but Jenna instantly associates that anger with her own lies and deceptions; of how she keeps lying to people. Jackie becomes an inactive

¹¹¹ “Fjölskyldan þurfti ekkert að fá að vita um mina hagi. Af því litla sem maður réð sjálfur í þessu lífi hlaut eitt að því að mega vera ævintýrið sem aðrir fylgdust með úr fjarska.”, 15.

¹¹² “Guð blessi Ameríku. Hvað hélduð þið eiginlega? Að ég segði ykkur satt? Þið eruð rugluð, Þið eruð fíkin í skáldskap, þið lifið í lygum ... *We fooled ya’ll*, segir Jackie og flissar.”, 27.

¹¹³ “Því var logið að þeim.”, 49.

participant in Jenna's game of lies and deception, by simply being her daughter who is entirely dependent on her mother. Jenna tries to make Jackie understand that everyone participated in the lying game of prosperity and economic boom, and states that people *wanted* to believe the lie, indicating how people called the economic crash upon themselves: "They wanted to believe that, I counter defensively and Jackie falls silent, her mind on full blast, and I fear that she is cooking up a revolt against me, against the made-up world."¹¹⁴ Here connections are drawn between Jenna's lying and deception, and the illusions of wealth and prosperity of the pre-crash society, suggesting how Jenna is progressively approaching some kind of crash herself.

The protagonist's description of the economic crash and crisis reflects her own personal attitude of lying and deception. Jenna's identity is constantly put into question, indicating how easy it is to construct a fake identity which does not hold up to scrutiny. This theme of lies and deception is reflected in the form of the narrative, which is built around different revelations. Little by little, Jenna reveals and admits her lies, which are multiple and manifold. When she admits her lies to her readers she makes them her accomplices and creates a pact: I lie to my family but I am honest to you, dear reader. This creates a link between the narrator and the reader and maps out a system: Jenna lies to everyone else, other than the reader who follows her lies and deception and is aware of them. However, as the narrative progresses the reader also learns how Jenna has lied and deceived him or her by giving numerous versions of her life in the United States that she admits, later in the story, are not true. She starts the story off by telling the reader how she fled to the States because she wanted to stay away from her family. She tells us how she met a man who was well off and from an upper-class family, married him, had his daughter and then divorced, and how she lives now off her ex-husband's salary. Later she admits to the reader that she was in fact married to a different kind of man; a gangster type whom she met when working as a stripper. She goes on constructing a narrative about this life, only to admit thirty pages or so later that she never was married at all and that Jackie is in fact the daughter of an old boyfriend who broke up with her because of her compulsive lying. The structure of the novel appears, thus, in the following manner: The narrator-protagonist Jenna goes on constructing a very believable story-world and detailed plot, only to admit later that it is a complete fabrication. The reader is therefore left in uncertainty about her true identity. This creates the situation of defamiliarisation, as the reader is taken by surprise when he or she finds out that the story the protagonist narrator has been telling is not true: that the story-world the

¹¹⁴ "Þau vildu samt trúna því, reyni ég að verjast og Jackie þagnar, hugurinn á fullu og ég óttast að hún sé að kokka uppreisn gegn mér, gegn upplogna heiminum.", 49.

reader has accepted as “believable” is in fact a complete fabrication and that the narrator has broken the pact about being honest to the reader whilst lying to everyone else. In the latter part of the story, the reader learns how Jenna has taken up creative writing at the University of Iceland when moving back home, suggesting that the fake identities of Jenna might in fact be her writing experiments. This gives the narrative a meta-fictional dimension and adds a layer to the complex relationship between protagonist Jenna and the reader, as well as highlighting her status as an unreliable narrator. She also seems to take up creative writing when starting therapy, reflecting how the two different processes go together, but also blurring the limits between truth and fabrications: “Laufey [the therapist] says that lies are not without significance, any more than fiction or dreams. They are in fact created from the same material.”¹¹⁵ In other words, the therapeutic writing process, as well as her lies and fabrications, reveal something about her problems with the past.

Fake identities evoke the idea of the double, and these constant creations of fake identities create multiple doubles of the character Jenna. The double, or *doppelgänger*, is an important theme in the tradition of the uncanny, usually read as being the harbinger of death. It represents an encounter with someone who has stolen one’s life and reflects how the familiar self becomes unfamiliar.¹¹⁶ This last point describes the reading process of *Hvítfeld*; Jenna tells her story in the first person, which introduces a proximity and familiarity between the reader of the narrative and its protagonist. This familiarity is, however, disrupted when she reveals how she has lied to the reader about her true identity, whereby the familiar protagonist becomes unexpectedly and abruptly unfamiliar. The lies, illusions and deceptions of the narrator and main protagonist are among the elements that render the novel uncanny and create a reading process of uncertainty and obscurity. The double in the context of Jenna’s story becomes a harbinger for destruction: it announces the impending crash of Jenna’s illusions and fabrications, and the decline of the ideal she has constructed for herself, echoing the context outside the novel and the collapse of the collective national ideal.

Jenna’s compulsive lying becomes so excessive that when she starts therapy, something that her cousin, the investigative journalist Lovísa, encouraged her to do, she starts by lying about all kinds of traumas, secrets and horrible events in her life, until she is finally ready to face the lie and tell the truth. Jenna tries partially to explain, partially to justify this compulsion in a discussion with her cousin: “More or less, I say and try to explain how it is possible to

¹¹⁵ “Laufey segir að lygar séu ekki merkingalausar frekar en skáldskapur eða draumar. Í rauninni séu þær búnar til úr sama efni.”, 257.

¹¹⁶ Freud, “The Uncanny”, 210-11.

deceive oneself. Everyone does it in one way or another. Half of what we say to strangers is a lie; we say that we are doing all right when we are feeling miserable, that we look forward to doing something we'd rather not do. We never say the biggest lies out loud.”¹¹⁷ This quotation reflects Jenna's poor excuses for her compulsive lies and how she tries to whitewash her past. Lovísa, in the spirit of investigative journalism and in her constant quest for truth, or at least answers, argues that Jenna cannot carry on with her life lying like this: “But what are you going to do now? she asks. You can't continue as if nothing has happened. Everything has crashed, the deception ruined.”¹¹⁸ Once again, similarities are drawn between the social condition of the period and Jenna's personal behaviour, in this instance through the use of the verb “crashed” to describe the decline of Jenna's fabrications. Jenna even replies to her cousin by asking: “Am I being interviewed about the Crash?”¹¹⁹

But what to do when the many years of lying and deception about a glamorous life come to an end and the illusion crashes? According to Lovísa, the best thing to do is to *face the past* in the form of seeing a psychiatrist and going through therapy. Only then can Jenna sincerely and honestly deal with the root of her problems; the issues and causes that make her a compulsive liar. Jenna reluctantly agrees to see a therapist, but it seems that her daughter is the main catalyst encouraging Jenna to set matters straight and work towards a better future. However, the problem is not solved by signing up for therapy alone. Jenna must also actively work through her illusions and lies by analysing the causes for her dishonesty and need for false identities. It seems as if therapy, and the act of looking critically back on the past, goes alongside creative writing: “The light comes on in creative writing and now I have brand new dreams, where I am a brave and mature woman who shares her experience; writes a book about the humiliation and the way out of it.”¹²⁰ The writing process sheds light on the therapeutic memory work:

I still have the need to hide behind lies. As soon as I come close to some kind of truth, shame appears, you see. As if it emerges from below, and when you think

¹¹⁷ “Bæði og, segi ég og reyni að útskýra hvernig hægt er að blekkja sjálfan sig. Allir gera það að einhverju leyti. Þegar við tölum við ókunnuga er helmingurinn af því sem við segjum lygi, við segjum að við höfum það fínt þó svo að okkur líði ömurlega, að við hlökkum til að gera eitthvað sem við nenum samt alls ekki. Stærstu lygnar segjum við aldrei upphátt.”, 161.

¹¹⁸ “En hvað ætlar þú að gera núna? Spyr hún. Þú getur ekki haldið áfram eins og ekkert sé. Allt er hrunið, blekkingin ónýt ...”, 161.

¹¹⁹ “Er ég í viðtali um hrunið?”, 162.

¹²⁰ “Í ritlistinni kviknar ljós og nú hef ég eignast glænýja drauma. Í þeim er ég hugrökk og þroskuð kona sem miðlar reynslu sinni; skrifar bók um niðurlæginguna og leiðina út úr henni.”, 223.

it has arisen completely, you realise that you can only see its head. And when you think that all of it is there, you discover that shame does not have a body, and that what you can see is only the beginning of something that might be endless.¹²¹

This paragraph reveals how Jenna's problems are rooted in feelings of shame and humiliation and reflects on the post-crash social condition generally; not only how deeply rooted the illusions behind the economic expansion and prosperity actually are, but also how the decline of the illusion is inflected with sentiments of shame and humiliation. Here I am referring to the illusion that peaked during the boom-years and crystallised in the image of the Icelandic business Viking as representing some kind of superiority of the Icelandic people: a fantasy that in the end led to the crash and collapse of an entire economy as well as a national ideal, and resulted in a period of crisis and melancholic mourning. This theme of illusions, lies and deception is not limited to the main character of *Hvítfeld*, the protagonist Jenna, but extends to the other members of her family: her mother Hulda, father Magnús and younger sister Eufemía. The story of the family contains strong references to the events of the crash in Icelandic society, it even appears as a symbolic representation of the crash, since it represents a decline of an ideal, with themes that can be considered both uncanny and spectral. Family life becomes uncanny due to repression, where secrets are hidden and silenced to keep up appearances, while the spectral is to be found in the character of the younger sister, whose sudden death haunts the other family members, prompting them to look back and face their mistakes of the past.

Hvítfeld: unhomely family life and melancholic characters

Jenna starts the narrative by telling the story of her origins and her upper-class family on her father's side, which establishes the narrative of the patriarchal family ideal. Their sense of superiority is reflected, according to Jenna, in the family name "Hvítfeld" that roughly translates as "White-fur." Early on she recounts the family legend that explains the name, which her great-great-grandfather took up after having fought and killed a polar bear with his own bare hands. Jenna explains: "Grandfather tells many similar stories. They are all about our

¹²¹ "Ég hef enn þá þörf að skýla mér bak við uppspuna. Um leið og ég nálgast einhvers konar sannleika kemur nefnilega skömmin. Hún eins og rís upp úr kafinu og þegar maður heldur að hún hljóti að vera komin upp úr áttar maður sig á að það er ekki nema rétt kollurinn sem sést. Svo þegar maður heldur að allt hljóti að vera komið skilur maður að skömmin hefur engan líkama og að þetta sem sést er ekki nema blábyrjunin á einhverju sem gæti verið endalaust.", 220.

relatives, their superiority, courage and strength of character.”¹²² This is the patriarchy of the family and Jenna’s life. The rotten apples, also to be found in the glorious family image, all seem to come from Jenna’s great-grandmother: the feminine side of her family, the matriarchy so to speak. Jenna explains: “Grandmother, on the other hand, cannot pride herself on as splendid a background since her/my ancestors have been getting caught with their pants down for hundreds of years.”¹²³ Her grandfather refers to this part of the family as “subbulýður” (riff-raff). Jenna’s family is thus made up of striking opposites: of both outstanding and remarkable characters, and of people who are inferior in society: either working class, according to the grandfather, fishermen at the most, or bastard children. There seems to be nothing in between: in this family you are either a black sheep or a champion, which sets the standard high for Jenna and her sister, as well as for their father. This legend of family superiority creates a sense of a very distinctive and fixed family identity that members of the family are pressed to live up to. The reader, however, learns how they fail to seek recognition from their relatives, perhaps the most obvious example being Jenna, and her creation of fake identities that is a desperate attempt to live up to the family ideal. This theme of failure and deception is also evident in the personality and life of the father, Magnús.

One of the main threads of the story in *Hvítfeld* is the decline or crash of the father in the story. He appears as an example of “damaged masculinity” that also affects other characters in the novel, and forms a theme that refers strongly to the identity politics of the period and the decline of the masculine national hero expressed with the image of the business Viking. Unlike Garðar in *I Remember You*, the crime novel discussed earlier in this chapter, Magnús, Jenna’s father, is not a business Viking, but has, from young age, been under pressure to live up to the staged patriarchal family ideal: to keep up the honour of the Hvítfeld family and its public status. Magnús, however, desires to do something completely different with his life, but lacks the courage to stand up to his parents, and therefore follows the path they have chosen for him: goes to a prestigious high school, studies law at University, becomes a judge, marries, has children and moves into the family house. On the surface, the father seems to be confident, but as the narrative progresses it becomes clear how distant he is, isolated, and how he fails his wife and daughters. His true troubled self is gradually exposed through the communication with his two daughters: while he rejects Jenna, by not letting her live with him after the divorce from

¹²² Afi segir margar ámóta sögur. Þær eru allar af ættmennum okkar, yfirburðum þeirra, hugdirsku og myndugleika,” 9.

¹²³ “Amma státar hins vegar ekki af jafn glæsilegum bakgrunni vegna þess að forfeður hennar / mínir hafa verið með allt niðrum sig lengst aftur í aldir.”, 9.

her mother, he cries in the arms of Eufemía, whom he, however, also hits. In the final chapters, Jenna learns that her father struggled with substance abuse for a long time and after Eufemía's death he goes completely off the rails: he divorces his second wife, moves out of the family home, sells the house, rejects an important promotion, abandons his career and becomes a full-time junkie.

It seems as if Magnús fails his daughters because his parents failed him. A scene in the narrative appears as a turning point in his life: the first time he meets his future wife and the mother of his daughters, Hulda. Magnús describes how he and his friend met Hulda as a girl playing with her dolls. At first, his friend started to tease Hulda but the teasing abruptly intensified into violent harassment. Magnús manages to stop him and is shocked, traumatised even, by the behaviour of his so-called friend. He discusses the incident with his father the same evening and cries, but is no less shocked by the reaction of his father who tells him that there is nothing they can do about this, this is just how things are, how boys are, and so forth (206). At first the father seems to be mostly worried that Magnús would be accused of having harassed the girl. But when he learns that he has no need to worry about this, he disregards the matter as irrelevant. This scene shows how Magnús violently loses his innocence and his faith in the world, and learns from his father to repress his true feelings and secrets; how to repress agency and become an inactive member of society and a bystander who does not react to social injustice and violence. The incident highlights the nature of the marriage of Magnús and Hulda: while he tries many years later to discuss the matter with Hulda, she refuses to address it or talk about her childhood trauma. Magnús and Hulda's inability to discuss difficult memories and shocking events gravely affects the next generation. Jenna experiences refusal or rejection from the father, which seems to be the root of her problems, explaining her compulsive lies and constant need for recognition from others. Jenna seems to lie out of fear of being rejected. When Jenna asks her therapist why she is like she is – why she keeps on lying – the therapist replies: “Cells, [...] each time we swallow shame, it ends up in the head of a descendant.”¹²⁴ This explanation suggests the effects of *phantom* memory, using Nicholas Abraham's term, which describes how family secrets and traumas are inherited from one generation to the next through forms of repression, silences and hesitation.¹²⁵ Repression, a systematic and forceful forgetting, seems

¹²⁴ “Frumur, segir Laufey hugsí, í hvert skipti sem við kyngjum skömm lendir hún í hausnum á afkomanda.”, 265.

¹²⁵ “The phantom is, therefore, also a metapsychological fact. Consequently, what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.” Nicolas Abraham, “Notes on the Phantom”, 287. Abraham distinguishes the phantom from the crypt and mourning: “Because the phantom is not related to the loss of a loved one, it cannot be considered the effect of unsuccessful mourning, as is the case of melancholics or of all those who carry a tomb within themselves.” 288.

to be inherent in the family identity, as a particular transgenerational form of family memory. Or rather, how memories are not communicated between generations but silently and secretly inherited, as discussed in relation to the concept of postmemory in chapter two of thesis.

At one point Jenna talks about the “family-legend” when she mentions how her maternal family talks about Hulda, Jenna’s mother, as having been an ideal student until her mother, Jenna’s grandmother Dýrleif, dies unexpectedly and something goes wrong. The legend of Hulda turns, however, not to be so straightforward, as she seems to have been plagued by mental illness from a young age. Her teenage years are described as solitary and lonely, and her family turns a blind eye to her condition:

She sometimes got these kinds of attacks when she was a child; as she stepped into a strange world where everything ordinary became uncanny. Her mother used to say that she just had a little more imagination than was good for her. When this happened, it was important that Hulda should not be alone. She crouched down in the arms of the next family member and waited until the anxiety slackened off and everything became normal again. She had difficulty moving, just as she was now lying motionless and moving farther away into strangeness.¹²⁶

Here, the uncanny describes the condition of mental illness, where everything ordinary becomes uncanny during the moment of a severe anxiety attack. As Freud discusses, madness and epilepsy are considered to be uncanny diseases, perhaps due to their transformative effect on what is considered to be the “normal” human condition.¹²⁷ Hulda’s illness develops further when she experiences a kind of trauma. When she starts university she develops a romantic affair with one of her teachers. Or rather, it seems as if the teacher is the one who initiates the relationship at his office in school, implying sexual power play and aggression on his behalf. Over the next months they have a secret sexual relationship that nobody knows about, not even Hulda’s friend and flatmate, even though the affair takes place in her room in the flat the two of them share. One time, when the flatmate suddenly comes home, the teacher escapes out the

¹²⁶ “Hún fékk stundum svona köst þegar hún var lítil, eins og hún stígi inn í framandi heim og það sem áður var venjulegt varð óhugnanlegt. Mamma hennar var vön að segja að hún hefði bara aðeins meira ímyndunarafli en henni væri hollt. Þegar þetta gerðist var mikilvægast að Hulda væri ekki einsömul. Hún grúfði sig í fangið á næsta fjölskyldumeðlim og beið þangað til angistin dróst saman og allt varð aftur venjulegt. Hún átti bággt með að hreyfa sig og nú liggur hún einmitt hreyfingarlaus og færast lengra og lengra inn í framandleikann.”, 148.

¹²⁷ Freud, “The Uncanny”, 220.

window, which also turns out to be the last time Hulda sees him. Later she learns how he had multiple affairs with other students, leading to his dismissal from the university and his move to Norway with his wife and kids. Hulda, who had been deeply in love for the first time and unsuspecting of the teacher's affairs with other students, is shocked to hear the truth. Not long after, her mother dies suddenly from a heart attack. Hulda seems to go through a severe shock at the death of her mother and her reaction is bizarre. She holds on to the body of the deceased mother and refuses to let go until her siblings release her: "Hulda lay down in her [mother's] bed and clung to the warmth that remained in the dead body. This is where the drama of Hulda's mental health reached its maximum: it wasn't possible to get her away. She clasped the dead body and refused to let go. In the end the nurse had to be called in, and gave her a sedative."¹²⁸ After this moment with the dead mother, Hulda seems to be stuck in a state of shock, she doesn't speak and cannot seem to hear what her siblings say. This behaviour suggests what Freud termed the illness of mourning, or melancholia as a form of pathological mourning, when the grieving subject cannot let go of his or her feelings of attachment to the dying subject.¹²⁹

For the other members of the family, who do not know better, it seems as if the death of the mother has caused Hulda to suffer a severe nervous breakdown. The reader, however, knows that this state of shock is also caused by a different kind of grief and loss: the heartbreak Hulda experiences when her love affair with the teacher suddenly comes to an end and she learns about his infidelities and betrayals. Hulda becomes gravely ill over the next weeks, and is described as a ghostly figure: "Next week she was like a ghost and even though she came back to her senses, traces of the ghostly appearance could always be seen."¹³⁰ Here the ghostly similarities portray Hulda as a figure of vulnerability, a mentally ill person in a helpless state who cannot seem to defend herself and voice her inner thoughts and opinions. It also affects her role as a mother, and her relationship to her daughters: "Mother gets stuck staring into space more often than others. She does not listen to what one tells her and her touch is in some way alien and cold."¹³¹ Looking back later, the mother's sister Agnes tells Jenna that the mother has without a doubt battled with severe depression all her life without receiving any help. She further tells her how the depression worsened when Jenna was born and how she could not take care of her

¹²⁸ "Hulda lagðist upp í til hennar og ríghélt í hitann sem enn var í líkinu. Þarna nær dramatíkin um geðheilbrigði Huldu hámarki: Það var ekki hægt að slíta hana lausa. Hún læsti sig fasta utan um líkið og neitaði að sleppa takinu. Á endanum þurfti að kalla til hjúkrunarkonu sem gaf henni róandi.", 46.

¹²⁹ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", 205.

¹³⁰ "Næstu viku var hún eins og draugur og þó svo hún kæmi til sjálfrar sín eimdi alltaf eftir af þessu draugslega yfirbragði.", 46.

¹³¹ "Mamma fær störu oft en aðrir. Hún hlustar ekki á það sem maður segir henni og snerting hennar er á einhvern hátt annarleg og köld.", 46.

as a baby. Instead of seeking psychiatric care for her sister, Agnes attended to the baby every day while Hulda lay in bed. She also made sure not to tell her husband Magnús, who was busy at work, about his wife's condition. Agnes goes on to explain to Jenna the shame associated with mental illness at that time, and how she feared that Hulda would never be able to return to normal life after having spent time in a mental institution. This explains how the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship between Jenna and her mother is rooted in the mother's postpartum depression, and how it has undoubtedly influenced Jenna's personality disorder. Hulda's affair with the teacher that she never tells anyone about, remains one of the biggest "lies" in the family history in *Hvítfeld*. As the story continues, the reader learns that the teacher is the real father of Eufemía, as Hulda picked up the relationship with him later in her life whilst married to Magnús. This explains the problematic father-daughter relationship between Magnús and Eufemía.

Eufemía, Jenna's younger sister, is publicly the family's black sheep: a difficult character, a drug addict and a criminal. Nevertheless, as the story develops, it becomes more obvious how her tragic fate is the result of negligence and how her troubled parents did not care for her. The chapters about her describe how at a young age she was plagued by social anxiety, how she had difficulties studying, probably because she was dyslexic, and how she could not relate to the other kids in her class, leaving her without friends. The chapters about Eufemía describe how lonely she is, and isolated: how her parents fail her completely by not listening to her or trying to help her, leaving her to her own devices. When she becomes a teenager she looks for company in other places than in school and at home, and starts hanging out with older and other troubled teenagers. She is young when she starts drinking alcohol and going to parties in dubious places, later leading to her drug addiction and petty crimes. Eufemía is the outspoken black sheep in an otherwise perfect family, and Lovísa explains to Jenna how disappointed their grandfather was in Eufemía for the sake of the family's reputation: "Grandfather Steingrímur was devastated and felt as if Eufemía had humiliated the family, dirtied the white fur."¹³² The different status of the two sisters is reflected in their names. Jenna is named after her paternal grandmother, who is, like her, perfect on the outside but severely troubled on the inside. At one point, the reader learns that the mother chose the name Eufemía because of her love for Greek literature which she studied briefly at university. Later, the reader understands how the name relates Eufemía to her true father, the Greek professor and secret lover of Hulda. The mother's

¹³² "Steingrímur afi var alveg eyðilagður yfir þessu, fannst Eufemía hafa fjölskylduna að fifli, skíta út hvíta feldinn.", 163.

name is also highly symbolic considering that “Hulda” in Icelandic refers to secrecy. The dark family secret is thus highlighted in Eufemía’s name, which for many is the most important aspect of one’s personal identity and sense of self. Eufemía is also the name of a Christian martyr who died for her beliefs, suggesting how the character of Jenna’s sister is the sufferer who dies for her family’s sins, and how her death creates regret and guilt in the minds of the others.

Hvítfeld is thus first and foremost a generational novel which tells the story of different family members at different times. This creates the novel’s historical long view which connects it to the crime novel *I Remember You*, discussed earlier in this chapter. As in the crime novel, the historical long-view of *Hvítfeld* expresses how repression works on multiple levels: how the secrecy of the past is bound to affect the present. But why this endless melancholia and unhappiness, lies and deception, that lead to the destruction of the *Hvítfeld* family? It seems as if they are rooted in repression and in the pressure of living up to the family ideal and identity suggested by the family name Hvítfeld (“White fur”). The family name reflects how the family wants to see themselves, or rather how the father, the head of the family, Jenna’s grandfather, wants to see himself and his descendants. The grandfather is a clear example of a patriarchal authority figure who sets the rules for others to live by. The name “Hvítfeld,” moreover, has deep ties with skin-colour, ethnicity, racial difference and hierarchy discussed in relation to colonialism earlier in the thesis, and the ideals of the grandfather resonate with the ideology of the prosperous pre-crash society. The emphasis on the colour white echoes the inherent discourse of the “we are not terrorists” campaign, a post-crash reaction mirroring the emphasis on the business Viking ideal of pre-crash Icelandic society. The melancholic state of the characters of *Hvítfeld* is due to the generational repression within the family, which has led them to repress their problems and pressed them to set up false identities which are far from being a “true” reflection of their own selfhood. This state affects how the family members react to the sudden death of the youngest daughter.

Hvítfeld: melancholic mourning

The topic of grief is addressed directly, when characters discuss their experience of loss, as well as being the central theme of the narrative as a whole: the death of Eufemía becomes the main stimulus for the narrative, as the reaction of the family and their mourning process spins the plot of the story. Mourning is therefore an important topic in *Hvítfeld*, and can be linked to the aftermath of the collective shock of the financial crash, as it expresses a *spectral* form of

mourning that takes the form of a haunting due to repression that is coloured by feelings of guilt, shame and regret. This theme of mourning and grief is addressed on the public level, with discussion of collective mourning in the aftermath of tragic events on a large scale, as well as on the personal level and how individuals deal personally with loss. Instead of suggesting that the novel's discussion of collective grief mirrors personal loss directly, it implies a relation between the two, and the attempt of approaching the collective through the individual, making the story of Jenna and her family, and their problematic state of mourning, symbolic for the post-crash period of loss.

The collective form of grieving is addressed when Jenna discusses her experience of 9/11, the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, a collective trauma that initiated collective mourning. The attacks are a large-scale event, a trauma that a large group of people experienced collectively, yet differently. Jenna explains: "In September the attack on the Twin Towers took place and everybody said the world would change. [...] Everywhere around me were people crying. A peculiar silence lay over the city and sometimes I thought that this had only been the beginning. That one night I would wake up to my body being ripped apart. That the world would truly change, that the West would be taken in one night."¹³³ In the aforementioned *Panic and Mourning*, Diana Gonçalves discusses how the aftermath of 9/11 rapidly turned into a "spectacle of mourning," where people experienced the need to express their feelings of grief very openly, creating "small and spontaneous memorials" around the city and performing rituals, and how the media followed these acts closely by becoming a "vehicle for mourning."¹³⁴ By discussing the events of the Twin Towers terrorist attack, the author locates the story in a specific time-space. For Jenna's generation the event marks the beginning of a collective fear of terror and terrorist attacks; an uncanny intrusion into the ordinary homely world. Or, as Connan elaborates: "The uncanny thus suggests a state of suspension between the world as comforting or re-assuring and terrifying or absurd, because it involves a striving to regain a sense of coherence and harmony."¹³⁵ The reference to 9/11 serves as a subtext, implying how the uncanny becomes an underlying theme, even a zeitgeist, in Western culture at this time. At

¹³³ "Í september var ráðist á Tvíburaturnanna og allir töluðu um að heimurinn ætti eftir að breytast. [...] Allt í kringum mig var grátandi fólk. Sérkennileg þögn lagðist yfir borgina og stundum datt mér í hug að þetta hefði bara verið upphafið. Að eina nóttina myndi ég vakna við að búkurinn á mér tættist í sundur. Að heimurinn myndi raunverulega breyast, að Vesturlönd yrðu tekin á einni nóttu.", 84.

¹³⁴ Diana Gonçalves, "From Panic to Mourning: 9/11 and the need for spectacle" in *Panic and Mourning*, 233-246, 239. Gonçalves even speaks of 'mournitainment' in relation to 9/11, when feelings of mourning are publicly exhibited in an entertaining way, for example through a TV show, and under the pretext of paying respect to victims, 239.

¹³⁵ Connan, *Subjects Not-at-home*, 12.

a different level, it also points to how the idea of melancholia, as a state of endless mourning or grief that persists, is *generalised* to a certain extent, as it is believed to be experienced collectively, or rather universally, and therefore without taking into account how people related differently to the attacks. This aspect can be easily related to the idea of the crash and its aftermath: of how easy it is to fall into generalisations by simply describing how the period of crisis following the crash was a period of collective mourning. It is therefore important to highlight that, even though many experienced feelings of loss during the period of crisis, they did so in variable ways, as the events impacted differently on people's lives.

Jenna highlights the different forms of mourning when discussing the topic with her friend. The friend has lost his mother and brother, and Jenna discovers how she conceptualises the process of grief differently from him: "he spoke for a long time about grief, how it visits you, sits in your lap and you have to let it sit. Allow it to be until it pleases to go away. I tried to think about grief as an external phenomenon but could not."¹³⁶ This quotation shows how people react differently to loss and experience grief in multiple ways, which complicates the distinction Freud made between mourning and melancholia. However, it also illustrates Freud's theorisation, by bringing forth how Jenna's friend experiences grief as temporary, and therefore echoing the "healthy" process of mourning, where the subject initially overcomes the loss. This does not apply to Jenna: "I feel much more that it has swallowed me up a long time ago and that I am all day trying to peek out through its throat."¹³⁷ Here she expresses how her feelings of grief are extended and how her mourning has taken over her life. Perhaps because the death of the sister is a shock that stirs up the repression that has governed Jenna's life and has been carried out through the generations of her family.

The discussion of grief appears again when Jenna comes across an interview in glossy magazine in a dentist's waiting room. The interview tells the story of a lady whose parents were murdered, and how she, after years of depression, drugs and suicide attempts, was able to overcome the trauma and use it as a motivation to mature, change and learn: "I understood that shocks are part of life and they are supposed to function as a stimulation. They should change us, mature us and teach."¹³⁸ This attitude suggests a particular perspective on the past and how

¹³⁶ "hann talaði lengi um sorgina, hvernig hún heimsækir mann, sest í kjöltuna á manni og maður verður bara að leyfa henni að sitja. Leyfa henni að vera þangað til henni þóknast að hverfa á brott. Ég reyndi að hugsa um sorgina sem utanaðkomandi fyrirbæri en gat það ekki.", 55.

¹³⁷ "Mér finnst miklu frekar eins og hún sé löngu búin að gleypa mig og ég sé allan daginn að reyna að gægjast upp úr kokinu á henni, sagði ég.", 55.

¹³⁸ "Ég skildi að áföll eru hluti af lífinu og að þau eiga að virka sem eins konar hreyfiafl. Þau eiga að breyta okkur, þroska og kenna.", 29.

one looks at past events. The lady in the interview elaborates: “I am constantly changing, but not the past, it moves away and the more I talk about it – look right into the centre of the horror – the further away it moves.”¹³⁹ These speculations on trauma and mourning are certainly in some sense clichéd. They have, however, two functions. Firstly, they illustrate the amount of discussion of trauma and mourning in popular media: how stories of personal traumas and mourning are constantly being published. Narratives of this sort tend to have a normalising effect, telling people what the process of mourning should be like. The second function of the interview and the idea of “trauma as a stimulus” is that it prepares the storyline that follows, which is centred around the family mourning a lost daughter. It appears early on in the story, before Jenna decides to go back to Iceland and face the past. What is also interesting about this interview is how the lady who experienced the trauma stresses the space and setting of the traumatic memory: “The living room where my parents were murdered is now my living room: a place where my life flourishes and enjoyable memories come into being.”¹⁴⁰ Here the relation between space and memory is emphasised, indicating how the woman manages to use the space to overcome the tragic memory. This is in striking contrast to Jenna and her family, where the inheritance of the family house indicates the inheritance of difficult memories, repression and secrets. The next section explores how the generational repression and melancholic mourning are expressed with the creation of a spectral space, that is homes that are “unhomely,” and where, in the larger context, the home becomes a symbol for the nation.

Hvítfeld and the spectral space: the unhomely home

While the houses in Yrsa Sigurðardóttir’s narratives are haunted by supernatural ghostly figures, the houses described in *Hvítfeld* are spectral and unhomely because they house a defamiliarised family life, where the warmth and security usually associated with the home have been replaced with feelings of solitude and isolation. The houses of *Hvítfeld* give the uncanny narrative a spatial frame and reflect the unhomely theme concretely, as well as intensifying how the decades of repression affect the inhabitants, their selfhood and identity. The concept “unhomely” is highly relevant to the circumstances described in *Hvítfeld*: on the one hand it refers to the intimate space of the home and is linked to security and nostalgia, the familiar and agreeable, while on the other hand it means something that is concealed, hidden

¹³⁹ “Ég breytist stöðugt en ekki fortíðin, nema að hún fjarlægist og því meira sem ég tala um hana – stari beint í kjarna hryllingsins – því lengra.”, 29.

¹⁴⁰ “Stofan þar sem foreldrar mínir voru myrtir er núna stofan mín: Staður þar sem líf mitt blómstrar og ánægjulegar minningar verða til.”, 29.

and kept out of sight.¹⁴¹ This suggests a relationship between the home, and the space of the family, to hidden secrets from the past; something *repressed* in a place usually considered peaceful and secure. Connan explains the strangeness of the homes in the French novels she discusses in this manner: “despite its familiarity and ordinariness, the *chez soi* as represented in these narratives harbors a certain strangeness. [...] the home and the ‘familiar’ world shed their reassuring, anchoring and identity-affirming connotations. Rather, we encounter subjects who are ill at ease, threatened or otherwise estranged from everyday spaces and phenomena.”¹⁴² The French term “chez soi” literally means “with oneself” but is traditionally used to express the idea of “home” indicating the close relationship between home and selfhood. Connan’s description of the ordinary yet unhomey homes applies to the houses of *Hvítfeld* that as spaces of repression are subtly threatening towards the inhabitants as they progressively work against the human subjects by alienating them, disturbing their peace and sense of self.

As the story develops, the reader slowly learns that Hulda’s childhood home was chaotic and messy and that her parents were compulsive hoarders who collected all sorts of junk. Jenna seems not to have known about this when she thinks about her mother’s obsession with cleaning. Her mother tells her that her obsessive cleaning is a reaction to her childhood home, and Jenna relates that statement with “conventional” forms of chaos; dusty furniture, dirty ash trays and dishes in the sink (39). Later, when her aunt Agnes has told her about her grandparents’ compulsive obsession, she starts looking differently at family photos by closely examining their “complex” background: “Nowhere an empty spot to be found, objects everywhere, little junk in piles and small items. On one photo, mother stands on the top of a newspaper heap and behind her the floor is covered with rubbish, as if someone has turned a waste bin upside down. Underneath the chaos, one can catch a glimpse of the furniture, and the closer I look at the photos, the clearer they become.”¹⁴³ Anthony Vidler approaches the uncanny from the viewpoint of space and spatial construction, drawing on the emphasis that Freud puts on the feeling of helplessness initiated by disorientating space.¹⁴⁴ By this he means the moment when one cannot find one’s way around an area and starts feeling as if it is working against

¹⁴¹ Connan, *Subjects Not-at-home*, 198 and 199.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁴³ “Þegar ég fletti í gegnum albúmið fer ég að rýna í bakgrunn myndanna. Ég hef oft skoðað þær áður en aldrei veitt því almennilega eftirtekt hvað bakgrunnurinn er flókinn. Hvergi er auðan flöt að finna, alls staðar eru hlutir, smádrasl í hrúgum og skrautmunir. Á einni myndinni stendur mamma ofan á dagblaðabunka á stofugólfinu og aftan við hana er gólfíð þakið drasli, líkt og hvolt hafi verið úr ruslafötu. Undir óreiðunni glittir í húsöggnin og eftir því sem ég rýni lengur í myndirnar því skýrari verða þær.”, 44.

¹⁴⁴ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, x.

one.¹⁴⁵ The same feeling is aroused in spaces where the perspective is unbalanced, in a way that subjects are not allowed to see properly, nor make their way around the space, for example, when getting lost in a fog, a forest, or simply in the dark. The fact that Hulda gets lost in her own home highlights its unhomeliness:

Look, she [Agnes] says, and points at a picture of herself in a bathtub filled with shoes and empty food containers. Neither your grandmother nor grandfather could throw anything away. The house in Hafnarfjörður was so filled with rubbish, that one had to pick one's way between rooms. It was almost impossible to clean because the piles were so dense, the dust-traps so many. One time, when Hulda was two years old, she got lost for many hours. She had fallen asleep somewhere among the rubbish, and not a chance of finding her.¹⁴⁶

This description of the uncanny and chaotic childhood home is extreme and excessive, and echoes the plotlines of the gothic crime novel discussed in the earlier part of the chapter, suggesting a situation of haunting: where hoarding becomes a symbol for a pathological attachment to the past, and where it fills up the subjects' living space with rubbish, preventing them from seeing clearly. Agnes states that Dýrleif made sure to cook healthy dinners for her children and keep their clothes clean, but as she grew older she became tired and weak and the compulsive hoarding was exacerbated. She was never ready to admit that they had a problem (44-45). Jenna concludes by thinking about the shame her mother must have felt when realising that her home was not normal. Thus haunting and repression, a denial of facing the problem, as well as the sentiment of shame, is to be found concretely within Hulda's childhood home, highlighting how these have come to govern her life, as well as demonstrating how her surroundings symbolically mirror her "disorientation" in life, her mental illness and spectral state.

¹⁴⁵ Here repetition plays an important part in the situation of not finding the right way and always coming back to the same place. This experience is close to being a dreamlike state, says Freud, and evokes fear and terror. He describes an experience from his own life when he got lost in a small provincial town in Italy and was overcome with the feeling of the uncanny. Freud, "The Uncanny", 213.

¹⁴⁶ "Sjáðu, sagði hún og benti á mynd af sjálfri sér í baðkari fullu af skópörum og tómum matarílátum. Hvorki amma þín né afi gat hent nokkru. Húsið í Hafnarfirðinum var svo stútfullt af drasli að maður ferðaðist eftir krákustígum milli herbergja. Það var nánast ógerningur að þrifa vegna þess að staflarnir voru svo þéttir, rykgildrurnar svo margar. Einu sinni þegar Hulda var tveggja ára týndist hún í marga klukkutíma, þá hafði hún sofnað einhversstaðar í draslinu og ekki séns að finna hana.", 44.

The respective childhood homes of the parents, Magnús and Hulda, are both unhomely – albeit in very different ways. Magnús describes his home as a typical upper-class home where everything is clean and in order: “Magnús’ home is so clean and organised that it would be very obvious if you would throw something on the floor. Even Magnús’ room is impeccable because he is told to clean it at least once a week. His mother stands over him and doesn’t allow him to stop until everything shines.”¹⁴⁷ This does not, however, mean that everything in their lives is in order, but rather how the disorder, troubles and rubbish are kept out of sight and not within the everyday dwelling space of the home. Magnús explains how the home was governed by a *double standard* in his parents’ attitude towards life and society. They enjoy art and music, but talk about artists as lazy slobs who live off working people’s taxes. They support a charity for third-world countries, but are racists at heart and speak in that manner within the four walls of the home (208). Magnús describes how in his youth he was supposed to stay in his room, and was not allowed to play in the living room or in other rooms of the house. The parents are incredibly cold towards Magnús and belittle him; his mother, for example, says he looks like a “mole” because he has gained weight (209). These rules and restrictions, along with the double standard and constant belittling, turn the home into a cold and hostile place. It indicates how the problems and issues that the inhabitants face are not welcomed in the neat space of the home and therefore not allowed to be addressed, stressing the meaning of the “unhomely” as referring to something kept out of sight. The description of clean surroundings and repression echoes the following description by Connan: “Despite its surface banality, the depicted world often strays from a familiar delineation by undergoing a series of subtle distortions. Familiar objects and individuals are endowed with strange characteristics. Family homes are portrayed as domains of secrecy or hostility.”¹⁴⁸ While the environment in Hulda’s home clearly indicates that her family has a problem, the troubles of Magnús’ family, secrecy and hostility, are hidden beneath the clean and banal surface.

Magnús later inherits his parents’ home, making it the childhood home of Jenna and Eufemía: “Eufemía and I grew up in a detached house at Ægisíða, a big house that our grandfather, supreme court justice Steingrímur Hvítfeld, had built during the sixties. It was

¹⁴⁷ “Heima hjá Magnúsi er allt svo hreint og skipulagt að ef maður henti einhverju í gólfið væri það mjög áberandi. Meira að segja herbergi Magnúasar er óaðfinnanlegt vegna þess að honum er skipað að þrifa það að minnsta kosti einu sinni í viku. Mamma hans stendur þá yfir honum og leyfir honum ekki að hætta fyrr en allt glansar.”, 207.

¹⁴⁸ Connan, *Subjects Not-at-home*, 10.

taken for granted that father would move in there with us, his family.”¹⁴⁹ Along with the house, Magnús also inherits his parents’ way of family life, suggesting how Jenna’s family is doomed to live in a melancholic state due to the surroundings. This brings to mind the idea of how haunting and ghostly presences are often seen as embedded within space and how houses become *haunted* by traumatic memories, as if the concrete location and space allows for the memories to persist. Which leads us to the symbolism of the home and how it becomes a symbol for a nation: how do these uncanny surroundings and unhomey homes relate to the larger post-crash context and what do they tell us about the *nation*? By tying a group of people, the family, to a specific place and location, the home becomes a recurrent symbol for nations, where people are united by geographical boundaries. The unhomey home, and its strange family life, therefore express, in this context, a nation that has become estranged due to repression. Like the homes in the novel, the nation has gone through this process described by Freud: “This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”¹⁵⁰ Connan elaborates on how the uncanny and estranged location affects identity: “Associated with the breakdown of the boundaries between strange and familiar, the uncanny is an elusive literary and colloquial term which expresses the disturbance of the *chez soi* [home/with oneself] both as location or environment and as an instance of selfhood.”¹⁵¹ Thus by the repression of a certain memory, the nation has created a collective national identity that is unfamiliar, unwelcoming and strange to most of its subjects. The contaminated home expresses how the nation, or rather the symbolic unity that is supposed to bind the nation together, is built on a collective lie or illusion in the form of a national ideal. Jenna’s problematic relationship with her family at home, along with her compulsive lying and need for fake identities, are in line with this formulation of the “disturbance *chez soi*” which highlights the relationship between home and self. While the location and houses in *I Remember You* are clearly and excessively threatening spaces that work against human subjects, the homes described in *Hvítfeld* are uncanny in their subtly threatening nature. The story of Jenna and her family suggests how the problems of the nation are rooted in the pressure of living up to the staged and false ideal, and in the repression of other traits that do not fit into the heroic image and superiority narrative the

¹⁴⁹ “Við Eufemía ólumst upp í einbýlishúsi við Ægisíðunu, stóru húsi sem afi okkar, Steingrímur Hvítfeld hæstaréttardómari, lét byggja á sjöunda áratug síðustu aldar. Það þótti síðan sjálfsagt að pabbi flyttist þangað með okkur fjölskylduna.”, 8.

¹⁵⁰ Freud, “The Uncanny”, 217.

¹⁵¹ Connan, *Subjects Not-at-home*, 11.

nation has created for itself. The representation of home in *Hvítfeld* therefore symbolises this mnemonic crisis with multiple levels of meaning: the home in the story initially represents a loss in the characters' lives, and their alienation, by being "a home" where they do not feel "at-home." This makes the novel a symbolic parable for home-loss and the state of post-crash precarity that proves to have multiple levels of meaning.

Literary ghosts and spectral memories of the financial crisis: concluding remarks

As already stated, *Hvítfeld* is not a horror story, unlike *I Remember You*, analysed in the earlier part of this chapter. It is rather an example of a spectral and uncanny story placed in a post-crash setting where family life becomes defamiliarised and the family members are all stuck in a melancholic state. While the haunted space ultimately kills the characters in the crime novel, the spectral and unhomey homes of *Hvítfeld* impact the wellbeing of their inhabitants in a different manner. The uncanny domestic space directly reflects the inner state of mind of its inhabitants, highlighting the intricate relationship between the home and sense of self. Thinking about the broader context, and the social conditions of the period, the fear of losing one's home can in this sense be read as representing, on a deeper level, the fear of losing one's self or, in other words, one's identity. Here one detects a resonance between the financial crisis, with the threat of losing one's home, and the mnemonic crisis, which corresponded to the loss of an identity; a collective or national ideal for people to live up to.

Freud describes how people tend to have uncanny feelings about the method of psychoanalysis, since its objective is to unravel illusions and lay bare what has been repressed.¹⁵² This mechanism of unravelling repression describes the plot in both novels analysed in this chapter. By focusing on the haunting in the case of the crime novel, it is possible to analyse what has been repressed and why, which initially leads to the solving of the crime. For *Hvítfeld* however, it means following how the family-lies and secrets are exposed and uncovered. The ultimate aim of both narratives is to reverse repression and work through obscurity and uncertainty, allowing the truth to finally come out. For the crime novel, it means locating the whereabouts of the two disappeared boys as well as seeking out who is responsible for the disappearance. For Jenna *Hvítfeld*, however, it means slowly exposing her own lies and fabrications as well as revealing the secrets of other family members. Jenna is not the only one in her family who lies, but the secrets of the other family members turn out to be different in nature; instead of lying directly and taking on fake identities, they have either chosen or been

¹⁵² Freud, "The Uncanny", 220.

driven to not tell the truth or not to be entirely honest, leading to the repression of traumatic memories and their true selfhood. The dynamic of individual failure versus the family ideal in *Hvítfeld* evokes the larger social context. The family drama reflects the tension between the individual versus the national, highlighting the true diversity of personal identities behind a staged national identity. In that sense, *Hvítfeld* uses the events of the *Crash* to highlight how an illusionary faith in an idealised homogenous (national) identity can lead to the collapse of social communities.

Chapter 4

The Visual Unhomely and the Spectral Spaces of the Economic Crisis

This chapter examines how two visual artworks respond to the events of the economic collapse in 2008, with uncanny and spectral aesthetics. The two works, one a collection of drawings and the other a series of photographs, appear to be direct and very conscious responses to the process of economic boom, collapse and crisis, that offer an intriguing visual comparison to the haunted locations in the novels discussed in chapter three. The economic process of prosperity and expansion that led to the crash and then crisis left its mark on the Reykjavík cityscape, as the building work following the economic upswing came to a sudden halt with the recession, leaving many buildings, even whole neighbourhoods, half-built around the city. The untitled drawings by Guðjón Ketilsson, from his exhibition *Roles* at the ASÍ Art Museum in Reykjavík in 2009, and the photographs that Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson started taking at the high point of the boom years, right before the collapse, for his series *Waiting*, portray the following period of stasis in the urban space. Both series portray how the process of fast economic upswing and then the sudden crash left uncanny marks on the cityscape, a certain *spectral emptiness*, calling to mind the idea of ruins. The term ruins usually applies to architectural structures that have lost their function, such as buildings that once housed human life and activity, but were abandoned and became empty and forgotten. In the case of the drawings by Ketilsson, the houses never attained the stage of containing human life, but immediately moved to the stage of “after-life” by directly becoming urban ruins. The series of photographs by Ragnarsson portrays half-built houses, empty neighbourhoods as well as decaying and derelict areas within the urban space. Decay and ruin are a fundamental trait of the *gothic* and of aesthetics expressing the uncanny, spectral and haunting.

In the aforementioned book *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin*, Davenport-Hines describes how the original British “Goths” were fascinated by architectural ruins, and how that fascination disseminated through the years to more symbolic forms of ruins, such as moral ruins (evil monks), corporeal ruin (physical decay), hereditary emotional ruin, as well as socio-political ruin (ethical void): “Gothic’s obsession with decay, and its tradition of political negativity, makes it at the end of the twentieth century an aesthetic of defacement.”¹⁵³ In his article, “These Are Not Old Ruins: A Heritage of the Hrun” from 2012, archaeologist Gísli Pálsson approaches the abandoned building sites of the economic collapse as ruins, and describes them as following:

¹⁵³ Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin*, 3-4.

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.¹⁵⁴

Thus I argue that the visual series by Ketilsson and Ragnarsson capture the *capitalist ruins* of the post-crash society, where the architectural ruin represents the *ideological ruins* of the period. The two series express how the urban space reflects the crash of the economic system as well as symbolising the downfall of a certain ideology: how the prosperous and booming economic expansion came to a sudden end, and, with it, the faith in the long-tradition of a national heroic ideal. These ruins are haunted spaces and their aesthetic suggests how the particular historical period should be examined as a moment of haunting. The following analysis will focus on what constitutes the haunting, as well as asking who is haunted and by whom?

¹⁵⁴ Pálsson focuses on the high-rises in Skuggahverfið, which I mentioned in chapter three in relation to the novel *Konur* by Steinar Bragi, and which I will discuss again later in relation to Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson's portrayal of them in the series *Waiting*. Pálsson conceptualises these sites as “theatres of memory” where “heritage practices take place, rather than being a carrier of intrinsic value,” and where “people conduct relationships with their pasts.” Gísli Pálsson, “These Are Not Old Ruins: A Heritage of the Hrun.” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 16/3 (2012), 559-76, 564.

Roles: photorealist drawings of the unhomely space



Image 4.1 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm.

Guðjón Ketilsson's series of drawings of half-built houses (images 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6) were part of a larger exhibition entitled *Hlutverk* or *Roles*, at the ASÍ Art Museum in Reykjavík in 2009. The drawings are detailed and portray half-built *crash* villas on the outskirts of Reykjavík. Still at the stage of development, these houses have not acquired any function, for example, by becoming homes for families. The artist describes them as teenagers, strongly built and trustworthy units, waiting to start their adult life.¹⁵⁵ They were exhibited alongside artworks inspired by everyday material and known domestic objects related to the home. The drawings

¹⁵⁵ This is how they are described in the article "Hlutverk hlutanna", in *Morgunblaðið*, 25 September, 2009. Available online: <http://www.mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/1301773/> [accessed 15.6.2020]

of the crash-houses were juxtaposed with other drawings of furniture and domestic appliances that had been stocked up as if waiting to be moved to a different location and into a new home. During the exhibition, these units, furniture and houses, have been emptied of their function, and turned into objects of art, allowing their formal traits to be emphasised. Sculptures made from old furniture were also on display in the exhibition and placed on the floor in front of the drawings (image 4.2). By exhibiting these different artworks together, a dialogue between the drawings and the furniture-sculptures is suggested, and questions raised concerning the role of the house as a living space and the function of objects for family life. The crash-houses appear as being without history, while the furniture has lost its previous everyday function and entered a stage of negligence and decay. The furniture and objects on the drawings are, however, in a state of waiting by being between two different locations.



Image 4.2 Guðjón Ketilsson, *Roles*, exhibition view, 2009, ASÍ Art Museum

The emptiness of the individual houses is highlighted when they are juxtaposed with the old domestic objects that have a long and unknown history, because they come from different places and were created at different times, suggesting a patchwork of memories. The idea of a patchwork comes to mind when looking at a chair that holds a stack of different pieces of wood (image 4.2). It suggests a stack of books, implying a very common alternative function of chairs

as storage spaces, and suggesting how the chair, and the wood it is made from, contain in fact multiple and manifold narratives. As the artist explains: “I have collected pieces of wood from different places and they have different stories.”¹⁵⁶ The pieces of woods are in different colours which illustrates their different origins and how in the past they have been parts of houses, boats, and perhaps other chairs. The houses in the drawings are, however, empty houses. They have no personal embedded history but become symbolic for a particular moment of haunting in Icelandic history; a period marked by *emptiness* and melancholia, created by the crash of the economic system, and the *ruin* of a collective national ideal, with the downfall of the business Viking as the ultimate, idealised and unifying national identity. In this regard, and as in the case of the family houses in the generational novel *Hvítfeld*, discussed in chapter three, the house becomes a symbol for identity, reflecting the strong relations between the idea of home and selfhood, place and nation.

The house and its form is a recurrent theme in Ketilsson’s oeuvre, as he has created several house-series. *The Village* from 1996 consists of bas-reliefs cut in wood showing variations of the house in its simplest form, made from one triangle and a square. *House IV* from 1995 consists of different sculptures, all similar in size, but formed in different house-shapes, and made from painted wood. Here the focus is on the form and composition, which viewers from different parts of the world recognise immediately as a house, suggesting a universal, or collective, formal language and raising questions about how human subjects create forms around their lives and living spaces.¹⁵⁷ The artist’s *Shell* from 2008 is on a similar note, where he exhibits a shelf with different objects that all have the same function of being “homes” in the sense of a structure for dwelling. Here he has gathered small models of houses, as well as drawings of urban plans of different cities, similar to abstract maps. The series *Sundays in Norðurmýri* from the year 2011 has strong visual correlation with the untitled series from *Roles*. The houses themselves are, however, completely different, as they are houses that have been lived in for decades: Norðurmýri is one of the most established neighbourhoods in Reykjavík (image 4.3). The house portrayed in *Sundays* is therefore in striking contrast to the houses of *Roles* by being ordinary *homely* house that has, through the years, housed domestic life.

¹⁵⁶ “Hlutverk hlutanna”, *Morgunblaðið*, 25 September, 2009.

¹⁵⁷ *Guðjón Ketilsson 1990 – 2010*, text by Ólafur Gíslason, English trans. Sara Brownsberger (Reykjavík: Crymogeia, 2010), 8.



Image 4.3 Guðjón Ketilsson, *Sundays in Norðurmýri*, 2011, pencil on paper, 42x42 cm.

In the exhibition *Roles*, the strangeness of the unfinished house is a state created by the economic crash. Or rather, the process of the economic expansion that made the construction of these houses possible to begin with, until the crash that called for the sudden stop of the constructions, and finally the crisis where the stop becomes a limbo and a state of indefinite waiting. The artist himself describes the work as having a meta-quality by referring to its own creative process, as well as to the work of the artist and the artistic process in general, when drawing a picture or building a sculpture and deciding the composition and texture of the object that he seeks to portray.¹⁵⁸ The decision to represent the houses with a drawing instead of a photograph draws attention to the role of the artist in representing the world. The fact that he decides to focus on these half-built houses, and to spend long hard-working hours in representing them, suggests an urgency and claims the attention of the viewer; these houses symbolise something important and something that we, the artist and his viewers, should not forget, but rather to which they should pay attention. In this sense, the drawings become carefully constructed *aides-mémoire*; while in real life these empty structures will eventually stop being half-built and become houses, or perhaps the opposite, be torn down and removed from the urban space, their artistic representation will live on as documents about this period in cultural history. By turning them into carefully constructed pieces of art, the artist asks for their inclusion in cultural memory, where they will live on, either as works that become part of the

¹⁵⁸ “Hlutverk hlutanna”, *Morgunblaðið*, 25 September, 2009.

canon and are regularly on display in the galleries of the museums, or carefully hidden yet preserved in the archive or the storage space of museums; the cultural unconscious.



Image 4.4 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm.

The series consists of several individual drawings. Each portrays in the foreground a structure that the viewer identifies as a half-built house (images 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6). These houses are large, with two and three floors, in the form of modernist villas, and echo the common mentality of the inhabitants of Reykjavík during the economic expansion, that raised the standard of living in general. The light in the pictures is soft and bright, shedding a comfortable light on the otherwise bare and dark grey houses, reminiscent of chunks of concrete rather than spaces

meant for a family. The nakedness of the house suggests how open it is to all kinds of weather; wind, rain and snow. That image is in contrast to the warmth and security usually associated with the home. On some of the drawings one can see pillars, wood and other support material that is supposed to sustain the structure, and ladders to access the floors above the ground floor. One can at times detect the environment in the background that either recalls rural spaces with lakes or empty fields, or the beginnings of a new neighbourhood that is being formed, with other empty houses in the distance. Pieces of wood and other materials lie on the ground around the houses, indicating how this is a construction area that is neither welcoming nor safe for any others than workers. These houses, and their isolated location within the urban space, are anything but homely and domestic.



Image 4.5 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm.

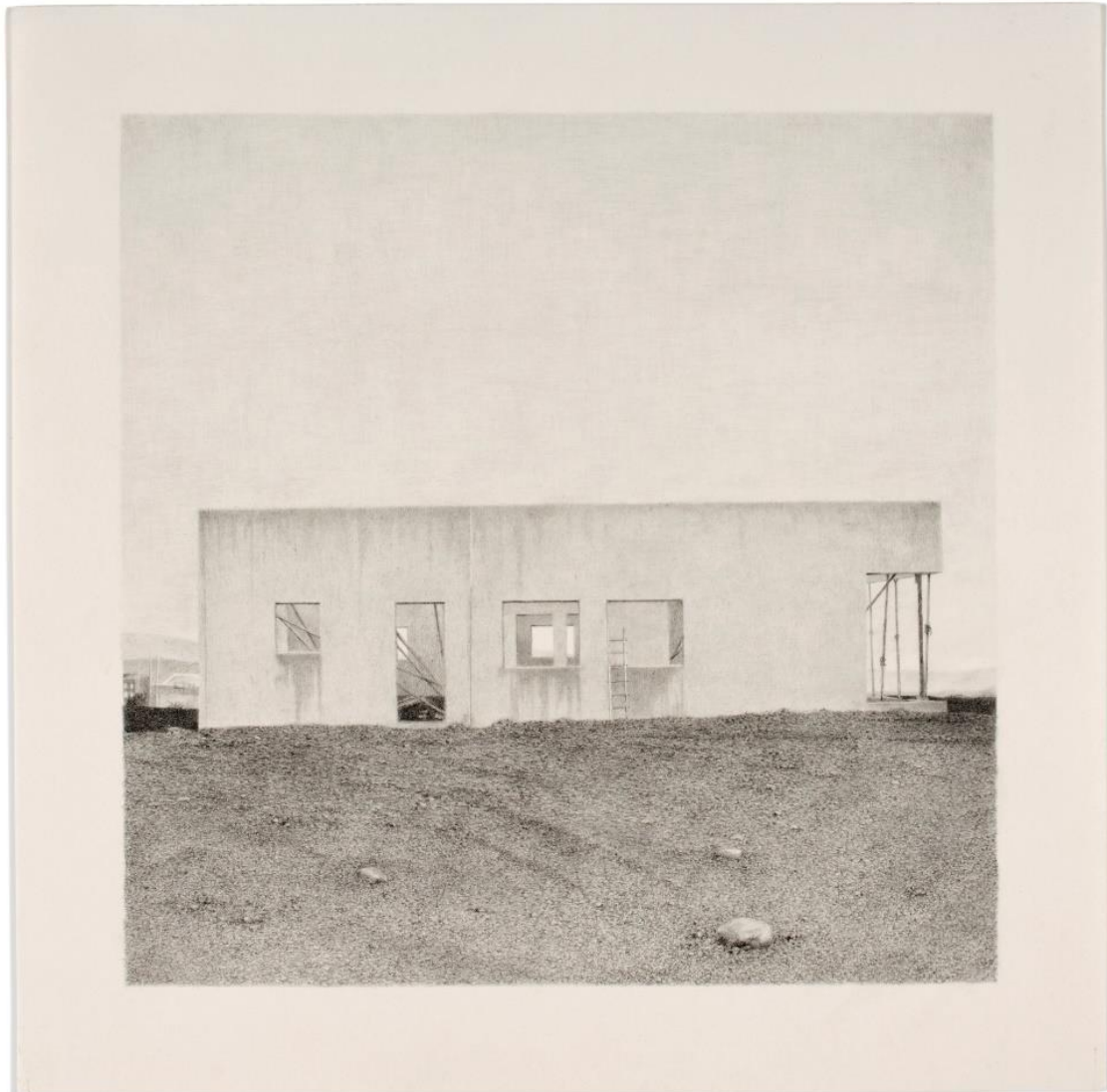


Image 4.6 Guðjón Ketilsson, untitled, 2009, pencil on paper, 40x40 cm.

The images portray the houses as strange objects and their specific aesthetics evoke gothic connotations of ruins and hauntings. The idea of ruins, in this context, implies a post-crash society in ideological ruins, where the inhabitants of the urban space collectively experience a period of emptiness and melancholia. Thus the drawings frame this historical moment as a period of loss: economic loss as well as the collective loss of a certain ideology, and with it the national ideal and hero in the form of the business Viking. The ruin-like status of the houses indicates a moment of haunting suggesting how these are in fact *haunted houses*. The melancholic aesthetics imply how these houses are nostalgically haunted by the loss of

prosperity of the pre-crash society. A more spectral reading sees, however, a different kind of haunting, which complicates the idea of a collective melancholia or mourning.

Roles: *The house and the human subject*

The parallels between the house and the human body are brought to light when it is stripped down to its most simple form. This suggests a relationship to the human subject who looks at the drawing and who herself experienced the aftermath of the economic crash, and shares the memories of the crash with a bigger collective; not only the other inhabitants of Reykjavík and Iceland, but also in the transcultural sense with inhabitants of, for example, Spain and Ireland. In this sense, the raw uncanniness of the houses can be read as being projected onto the viewer who sees herself in the house. When looking at the drawings the viewer might have the feeling of having been in a similar state during the crash and crisis, of having experienced the same feelings of nakedness and uncertainty, in her state of melancholic mourning. Here the relation between self and home is manifested, as the crash brought forth the anxiety of losing one's home as well as disrupting the heroic memories founding the collective national identity. The haunting and the human form represented by the drawings made by Ketilsson, however, not only suggest the possible inhabitants of the half-built houses but also make references to the workers who lost their jobs before completing the houses. The artist's endurance and long working hours, indicated by the detailed work of the drawings as well as the parallels with the human body, suggest yet another human subject related to the reality portrayed, and one that is absent from the images – as well as absent from common discussions on the crash and crisis: that of the construction worker who spent long hours building the structure. During the prosperity era in Iceland, physical labour was left to numerous migrant workers. Some of them left during the crisis but others stayed, and their part in restoring the finances of the country should not be underestimated. Pálsson addresses this in his article mentioned above:

Over the past two decades a large number of immigrants entered the country, primarily to meet a growing demand for manual labourers. 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.¹⁵⁹

The invisible migrant worker recalls Esther Peeren's discussion on *living ghosts* and *spectral agency* in her book *Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility*.¹⁶⁰ Peeren draws on Derrida's discussion in *Specters of Marx* on how capitalist society spectralises human subjects. Here the spectre does not announce something or someone who returns from the past, but is a person who is overlooked in the present and ignored, made expendable, marginalised and dispossessed.¹⁶¹ Peeren describes a duality in Derrida's discussion of the spectre, as Derrida both associates the ghost with powerful agents and systematic forces, and with the dispossessed subjects these systems produce.¹⁶² The former conforms to the idea of the ghost as a sovereign power who violently haunts the living and has no problem in moving between places and making himself heard. This powerful figure follows the model of the father's ghost in Hamlet and describes what Derrida terms the "ten plagues of the new world order," including unemployment, free market ideology, arms industry and trade, mafia and drug cartels.¹⁶³ The other example of spectral subjects are figures of vulnerability, the subjects that are exploited by the sovereign systematic forces. Or as Derrida states: "the ghosts who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism."¹⁶⁴ The vulnerable spectre is not only produced by the sovereign spectral system but also, according to Peeren, struggles against it: "The vulnerable ghost struggles against the spectralising system by which it is produced as invisible and irrelevant."¹⁶⁵ Peeren refers to Antonio Negri and his article "The Specter's Smile," which the author wrote as a critical response to *Specters of Marx*.¹⁶⁶ The spectre, for

¹⁵⁹ Pálsson, "These Are Not Old Ruins", 568.

¹⁶⁰ Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶³ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 101-102.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹⁶⁵ Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, 20.

¹⁶⁶ Antonio Negri, "The Specter's Smile" in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker, (London: Verso, 1999), 5-16. Negri's point of departure is the spectre as discussed by Marx in his writings: "Transferred onto the terrain of the critique of political economy, this project of spectral reading of ideology is applied to the categories of society and capital, develops ontologically, and becomes definitively fixed in Capital.", 6. The spectre, for Negri, is above all the offspring of capitalist society: "The 'specters of Marx' are therefore, in some way, the specters of capital. Those specters that appear in Capital, but above all, those specters that nowadays give shape to a society unanimously defined as 'capitalist' by political economy and public opinion.", 6.

Negri, offers the possibility of examining the phenomenology of capitalist production and announces a process of alienation and estrangement in the spirit of the uncanny: “A specter is the movement of an abstraction that is materialised and becomes powerful: above all the abstraction of value which, in a bloodless movement, vampirises all of the worker’s labour and, transforming itself into surplus-value, becomes capital; money, secondly, which in a circular movement verticalises itself and is consolidated into currency.”¹⁶⁷

In this way, the drawings by Ketilsson become haunting in more than one sense. Drawing on Peeren’s and Negri’s discussion of the living spectre of capitalist society, the half-built houses are haunted by the invisible worker who started building them, and whose labour was “vampirised” during the economic boom years. The absence of the worker from the images raises questions about his whereabouts in the present and his status in the post-crash society. According to this reading it is the absent spectre who renders these houses unhomely. However, the houses can also be seen as spectres themselves, since they visually evoke allusions to the classical form of the white-sheeted ghost, as well as channelling visually and spatially the unhomely impacts of the collapse and crisis on society. While according to Negri the invisible worker is unable to haunt capitalist society, the spectral half-built houses become concrete and spacious memorials to the temporary crash of capitalism: in other words, they become *capitalist ruins* par excellence. Their concreteness, along with their half-built unfinished state, supports and suggests the persistence of that spectral and haunting memory. The method of spectrally reading these drawings asks the question of what is really haunting these drawings, and allows a focus on something that is not present in the image, an absence. These drawings are extremely melancholic, signalling loss and impossible mourning for a collective future. When one thinks about the workers who engaged in the invisible labour during the prosperity years, and built the half-built spectral and unhomely houses, questions are raised: for whom was the pre-crash future exactly? In this sense, I argue that the invisible worker is a spectral force who haunts these images by questioning the symbol of the business Viking as a unifying ideal and capable of representing the many different cultural groups of pre-crash society. It becomes a force that complicates the idea of a collective mourning, to a degree deconstructs it, by drawing attention to how the collapse and crisis had a different impact on different social groups in Icelandic society. The photographs in the series *Waiting* by Ragnarsson are also void of human subjects. But they portray the urban places and spaces of the city during crisis and suggest a different type of haunting from the drawings by Ketilsson.

¹⁶⁷ Negri, “The Specter’s Smile”, 7.

Waiting: *Crash-photographs of emptiness and melancholia in the urban space*

The series *Waiting* by Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson portrays the rapid cultural and economic growth of the urban space of Reykjavík and its neighbourhoods during the boom years. The series refers directly and very consciously to the economic crash, as well as the economic expansion that very suddenly came to a halt and created the circumstances of the crisis: “The growth of the city correlated to the vast amounts of capital that was generated through borrowed capital, the illusion was transferred to changes in the urban landscape.”¹⁶⁸ The changes, transformations and movements of the urban space thus reflect the status of the social and cultural condition: “While the city is waiting it is starting to slowly decay and lose its character and has expanded as never before. Where there [once was] nature now stand half-finished houses, empty and waiting as the nation itself.”¹⁶⁹ The environment reflects the internal structure of the society and the social condition of its inhabitants. The series therefore becomes an important document or testimony, in some sense a memorial, to this historical period in Reykjavík, since it expresses how the expansion, and then the sudden crash, left temporary marks on the urban space. As in the case of the drawings by Ketilsson, the *Waiting* photographs by Ragnarsson are empty images, in the sense that they do not portray any human subjects. The images are, however, filled with traces of human activity and draw attention to the interaction between human subjects and their environment: how do humans impact their surroundings and, vice versa, how does space affect human subjects?

¹⁶⁸ Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, *Waiting*, Available online: <http://www.ihragnarsson.com/waiting> [15.6.2020]

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.



Image 4.7 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, “Empty” from the series *Waiting*, 2008. Private Collection.

The photos have a strong visual correlation to ruins. The uncanny aesthetics of the series appears in the houses that in their incompleteness and bareness are impossible homes, and the uninhabitable environment that surrounds these houses. The absence of human subjects in these images communicates the feeling of solitude, loneliness, even isolation. This aesthetic expresses the feeling of melancholia and a post-crash depression associated with the process of a collective and nostalgic mourning. The series attests to the connections between space and memory, in a sombre and spectral manner. The aim of the analysis is to read individual photos from the series *spectrally*: to respond to the haunting that is suggested with the empty ruin-like cityscape portrayed in the images. This allows for a moment of active and critical remembrance. By being a visual historical documentation, and capturing the urban landscape at a critical moment in time, the series offers the opportunity to slow down the constant dynamics of the urban space. In addition, it unravels the memories that lie underneath the grey concrete constructions. In the next section I will discuss the concept of *place memory* and examine how

it configures haunting and spectrality: how haunted space can represent the persistence of problematic memories, as well as how certain locations allow for that haunting to take place.

Waiting: contemporary urban space and memory

Paul Connerton discusses the relationship between memory and space in *How Modernity Forgets* from 2009, where he presents his concept of *place memory*, a form of site-specific memory which is connected to the human body.¹⁷⁰ It is founded on the legend of Simonides, an ancient Greek poet about whom Cicero wrote in *De Oratore*, which is recounted in Frances Yates' *Art of Memory* from 1966.¹⁷¹ Simonides was a guest at a dinner party; when he stepped outside, the roof over the banquet hall collapsed, killing all the guests at the party. Simonides could identify the bodies because he remembered who was sitting where when the accident happened. The arrangement of the seats by the table and in the room supported his recollection. Yates describes how his discovery of how spatial arrangement supports memory influenced the poet to create the art of memory, or *ars memoriae*, in order to help him to memorise long poems, narratives or speeches that he was meant to recite in public. The art of memory is founded on the principle of *loci et imagines*; the poet uses the imagination to envisage a "locus," i.e. a place or space, landscape, building or a room, which can be real or entirely imaginary. Within this space the poet places images, lively and memorable images, that refer to the words he needs to remember. Later he can visit the place in his mind, travel around the space to collect, in the right order, the images that support the recollection of what he wanted to remember in the first place.

The legend of Simonides reflects the strong connections that are generally regarded as existing between memory and space; how effectively space can influence memory and how memory is somehow concretised when grounded in space. Furthermore, one can imagine that the legend has served as a starting point in the theoretical tradition of relating memory and space, a tradition that perhaps reaches its high point with Pierre Nora's term *lieu de mémoire* which has often been considered in terms of "place" in the traditional sense.¹⁷² Connerton's term *place memory* can be conceptualised as being an attempt to modernise the theory grounding the *ars memoriae*, of how space and spatial arrangement support memory. The most important factor in the Simonides theory, according to Connerton, is how memory, and the act of remembering, is always dependent on the stability of place. In contemporary society this

¹⁷⁰ Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁷¹ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 1.

¹⁷² Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", 1989.

stability has, however, been lost due to the constant movement and rapid changes of the urban space, giving rise to a modern condition where forgetting has become the norm.¹⁷³ In *How Modernity Forgets*, Connerton discusses how post-capitalist society builds on and aims at forgetting, and how modern society impacts the individual's ability to remember.¹⁷⁴ Modernity is marked by forgetting, states Connerton, and is built on a process that seeks to separate social life from the environment and human scale; people live their lives at great speed, cities have become so massive and their planning so complicated that it is impossible to memorise them, urban planning has a short lifespan and cities for pedestrians no longer exist. This has fundamentally altered how people create and share memories.¹⁷⁵ Since modern cities are no longer planned on a human scale, their inhabitants lose the ability to memorise and remember. Even though the population of Reykjavík amounts to only two hundred thousand, it is a city that spreads out, covering almost three hundred square kilometres, making it impossible to travel around on foot. Like many cities in the US discussed by Connerton, Reykjavík is a city that is planned and designed for cars and their owners.

Connerton moreover divides his place memory into two different categories; *locus* and *memorial*. The memorial is constructed to memorialise a certain event, person or a place. Locus, on the other hand, is a place that is intertwined in our everyday life, and remembered unconsciously. The mnemonic function of the locus is therefore unconscious and unintentional, while the act of erecting a memorial is a conscious and deliberate choice. The memorial ties a memory to a place and can be, for example, a destination in a pilgrimage, a place-name or toponym, while locus is the place or environment where memories come into being, and can therefore be an ordinary house or a street.¹⁷⁶ The memorial and locus have different relations to cultural forgetting. Memorials can be influential and powerful places, but they can also become ambiguous when the memory they represent is multi-layered and complex. The memorial expresses a desire to remember, and is a reaction to the fear and threat of cultural amnesia.¹⁷⁷ Forgetting is, however, always an inherent part of the memorial; when events are deliberately selected to be remembered, other events are chosen to be forgotten.

The photographs taken by Ragnarsson express how the everyday cityscape of Reykjavík becomes a concrete locus: a place where the memories of the economic collapse and crisis are

¹⁷³ Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, i.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

concretised and materialised. However, these concrete memories only exist temporarily, or until the economic wheels are in motion again and building projects start impacting the cityscape once more. This suggests how the dynamics of the modern city echo the dynamics of memory; how places and memories are only momentarily concretised and then changed again. With his series, and through the means of the artistic photographic process, Ragnarsson transforms the locus, the everyday space, into a memorial that preserves the memory of a particular period in Reykjavík's history. Here the importance of photography as a tool of preservation emerges, rendering the constantly-shifting locus into a memorial on the photographic surface, while also subtly suggesting how the contemporary urban space is truly a place that supports forgetting. But how does spectrality and haunting fit into this picture of preserving a moment in the history of the city? Is there something that *haunts* these images or are the images themselves *haunting*? I will be able to answer these questions by examining how the uncanny aesthetics of the photographs express melancholia or a spectral form of mourning, signifying how the disruptive memory persists.

Waiting: capitalist ruins

The photographs of the series can be categorised into different uncanny themes, such as: images that depict half-built houses; photos of empty neighbourhoods which are more of a construction site than spaces for family life; and visuals of decay and derelict areas within the urban space. The themes are interrelated and reflect the constant dynamics in the urban space, as well as the moments of stasis, suggesting a tension inherent in the cityscape. The photos that portray half-built manmade structures, such as empty car parks, are juxtaposed with photographs that show natural features, such as mountains or empty heaths (image 4.7). The series includes, for example, more than one photograph of Mt. Esja, that overlooks the urban space in Reykjavík.

Many photos of the half-built empty houses or buildings have a strong visual correlation with the houses drawn by Ketilsson for the exhibition *Roles*. For example, the images that have a deadpan viewpoint, where the building almost fills out the frame of the picture. The image entitled "Empty House" portrays a half-built empty building that was probably meant to house offices (image 4.8). The parking lot is already completed, which reflects how much the city of Reykjavík is governed by cars and their owners. Streets were laid in the Úlfarsárdalur district, one of the neighbourhoods designed and planned during the boom, before the houses were erected. This means that when the building projects came to a halt, the place was left with random tarmac car parks, streets and roads in the middle of nowhere, not leading anywhere. A

small sign can be seen in the middle of the building, right above its entrance. It turns out to be a sign from REMAX real estate: *For Sale*. The sign becomes highly ironic in light of post-crash knowledge. Who, of the potentially bankrupt inhabitants, would like to buy a huge half-built building in the middle of nowhere, right before the lowest point of a severe economic crisis? As in the drawings by Ketilsson, the building has strong visual overtones of ghostly figures; it is spooky and is definitely unhomely, as an impossible and threatening dwelling space. Its uncanny characteristics suggest that the building is haunted by something that is absent from the photo. The “For Sale” sign becomes highly symbolic in this regard, and for this defining moment in the history of the nation. It expresses how, during the time of a near national bankruptcy, it is in fact the whole country that is *for sale*, which frames the loss of the heroic and financially independent national ideal.



Image 4.8 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, “Empty house” from the series *Waiting*, 2007.

The photos displaying empty neighbourhoods under construction show building materials that have been stacked up like Lego bricks or other building blocks for children. The photograph

entitled “Building” shows building material; single walls with holes for windows and doors that are stacked up and stored on the periphery of building sites (image 4.9). In the background one can see empty half-built houses that are waiting to be finished and for their inhabitants to move in, as well as houses where people have already moved in. One cannot but wonder about these inhabitants – how do they feel living in a half-built, empty neighbourhood, whose aesthetics are similar to a grey melancholic emptiness? In this regard, capitalist ruins come to mind, as these half-built structures bear witness to the crash of the capitalist system, reminding the inhabitants that the prosperous and booming economic expansion that created the promise of a bright collective future was bound to come to a sudden end. Here the melancholic aspects of the environment signal the loss of the collective objective, as well as the mourning for the loss of an ideal. The inhabitants become haunted by their surroundings, that constantly remind them of failed future plans and their collective loss.



Image 4.9 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Building” from the series *Waiting*, 2007.

The series also contains photographs showing how different times collide. The image entitled “End of the Line” shows an old road or a path leading up to a small house with a red roof (image 4.10). The house has seen better days and seems to have been built many years ago. The viewer cannot really see whether the house is abandoned, but if the inhabitants have moved away they have probably done so recently. In the background and up on the hill that towers over the little old house are modernist villas, almost ready for moving in, as well as construction cranes, calling to mind the drawings by Ketilsson. The photograph portrays two realities and two different periods; the past and the present, or perhaps rather the past and a future that did not materialise? It also portrays two kinds of nostalgia: one for the older, simpler times when houses were small and had red roofs, and the other for the times where the future was near and consisted of grand white modernist villas for everyone to live in – or at least for those who played their cards right. One could also read the photographs differently. By focusing on the tension between the two kinds of realities portrayed, the modernist villas become symbols of an unattainable sublime for the residents of the little house, who are reminded of their underprivileged position every time they exit their house.



Image 4.10 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, “End of the Line” from the series *Waiting*, 2007.

Another photograph works with the same theme. It is untitled, but shot in Skuggahverfið, a historical neighbourhood in Reykjavík that went through dramatic changes during the economic expansion. It portrays an old garden with a homemade wooden terrace and white plastic chairs (image 4.11). The garden is somewhat ragged and the contrast to the skyscrapers looming in the background is striking. The skyscrapers, or high-rises, that were constructed during the economic boom and house some of the most expensive flats in Reykjavík, are perhaps the most obvious, yet very charged, symbols for this historical period. They provide the setting for where the young woman is held captive in the novel *Konur* by Steinar Bragi, discussed in chapter three and often considered the quintessential crash novel. In the article on the heritage of Hrunið, which I mentioned before, Pálsson describes these houses as following: “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.”¹⁷⁸ The photograph sharply portrays the tension between the privileged and under-privileged, as it juxtaposes different types of living space for different classes. The juxtaposition draws attention to the broad range of social groups in Icelandic pre-crash society and their different living situations, which complicates the idea of the nation as one unity. It also challenges the promise of a *collective* bright and prosperous future implied in the boom years, and therefore its loss during the crash and crisis. In this regard, the image raises questions on the impacts of the financial crash for the different social groups in Icelandic society: how did the inhabitants of the derelict neighbourhood experience the economic collapse, as opposed to their neighbours in the high rise? The white plastic chairs, seen in the image and a sort of leitmotif of the series as they appear multiple times, become highly charged symbols in this regard. By being outdoor furniture meant for warmer and sunnier days, during the few times one can actually enjoy sitting outside in Reykjavík, they symbolise the desire for pleasure, relaxation and the good life, where one can relax in the sun. By being everyday objects they implicitly communicate this idea, while at the same time being in striking disharmony with the grey, cold and rainy environment.

¹⁷⁸ Pálsson, “These Are Not Old Ruins”, 566.



Image 4.11 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Fence“ from the series *Waiting*, 2006.

What is also striking about the image (4.11 and 4.13) is the chaos that is portrayed and seems to be a common feature of the environment. While the black and grey high-rises follow a rigorous and systematic urban plan, the older houses seem to belong to an environment that is more organic and chaotic: the white painted fence has been torn down, and unidentified objects or rubbish is strewn around the garden. This sense of chaos within the urban space, which is supposed to follow very systematic, authoritative, and at times hegemonic planning, is to be seen in other images in the series, in particular images that show the back garden of housing complexes and the backs of different houses and areas that the passer-by does not see. Here one can see graffiti on walls, and random objects and junk that has been left behind on the ground by someone unknown. The chaos and rubbish suggest haunting, calling to mind the situation described in the novel *Hvítfeld*, discussed in chapter three, where the family home is chaotic and filled with junk. The striking oppositions of the two forms of urban space, depicted in the image, one of the black and “proper” high rises, and the other of chaotic and slightly derelict spaces, expresses two different attitudes towards haunting. The chaotic space allows for the

haunting to take place, even desires the haunting to take place, by allowing rubbish and decayed objects from the past to persist. It reads as a form of resistance against the strict urban planning expressed in the high-rises. While the chaotic urban space allows for the memory to persist, the black high-rises aim to erase the memory and work towards a future of forgetting. The chaotic environment offers a spectral possibility by encouraging human subjects, living in the disordered surrounding, to look back to the past. Whether they do so reflectively or nostalgically is, however, up to the human subjects themselves.

The series also portrays old houses, clad in wood or corrugated iron, that have been removed from their original locations within the city to make space for new buildings (image 4.12). Their original location has for some reason become very valuable, and instead of tearing these houses down, they have been temporarily preserved before being relocated. Before they are moved to a new location they are stored away in industrial areas, where they temporarily lose their function as homes or shops. They are therefore *in waiting*. This is a very common practice with old houses in Reykjavík and suggests a process that houses go through, that follows the relentless changes of the urban space. These houses lose their immediate value, become historical documents that are “archived” and thus temporarily forgotten, but not entirely lost. They become spectral memories rendered in the state of passive memory.



Image 4.12 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Yellow House Two” from the series *Waiting*, 2007.

The outer appearance of these houses, for example how the windows have been broken and covered with random pieces of wood, suggest them as being *haunted houses*, drawing attention to the many spectral memories they might keep. These spectral houses can be seen as containing their own microcosmos: they have over the years housed different inhabitants, with different ways of life and mentalities, and who have created different memories within their space. But they are also connected to the larger urban context, indicating how they have witnessed different historical periods and perhaps gone through renovations and been situated in different locations. Instead of demolishing them, which conforms to a type of intentional forgetting, these houses are momentarily placed in storage on the margins of the urban space. They are similar to objects that lose their connection to the everyday life of the home when stored away in attics or basements. They are temporarily moved away from the public eye, but can be retrieved and placed in a new context in a different location within the cityscape. The moving of these houses reflects how the urban space simultaneously supports and contradicts memory; by removing these houses from their original location to another area which is not as much frequented, they

are made to be forgotten, at least for a moment, until they return, to different locations. This process of removing and forgetting, returning and remembering, shows how these houses become examples of spectral memories supporting the dynamics of memory. As already stated, their spectral connotations are nuanced by their visual appearances of empty and lifeless houses, and as impossible and unhomey homes.



Image 4.13 Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson “Garden” from the series *Waiting*, 2007.

Other photographs in the series portray derelict areas within the urban space, and have strong connections to other series by the artist that show derelict areas in other places in the world (image 4.13). These series imply a strong awareness of how the urban space is governed by financial forces and dependent on the economic system. The decay portrayed by Ragnarsson symbolises unhomelessness: “The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper. [...] It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of

something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home.”¹⁷⁹ It echoes the words of Nietzsche, used by Nicholas Royle as an inscription to the introduction to his book *The Uncanny*, about decayed and uncanny ruins: “We Europeans confront a world of tremendous ruins. A few things are still towering, much looks decayed and uncanny, while most things already lie on the ground.”¹⁸⁰ The photographs that show derelict places of the urban space become testimony of this; these are not tremendous and glorious ruins, but the ruins of the domestic where the homely becomes unhomely. The artist Ragnarsson states that he works on the margins between documentation and artistic photography, and his statement highlights how his photographs become artistic aides-mémoire that call for the viewer’s critical reflection, as well as emphasising the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in cultural memory. These images become examples of spectral memories; while the urban space is in a state of indefinite waiting, the half-built buildings and houses indicate an imminent forgetting of this historical moment. The uncanniness of the images defines this historical moment as melancholic; pointing towards how the inhabitants of the city became haunted by their half-built surroundings, since it constantly reminded them of their collective loss and nostalgic regret.

Concluding remarks: spectral mourning in the urban space

The half-built houses of the crash became a recurrent theme among Icelandic photographers and visual artists during the period, as there are numerous examples of works that portray half-risen buildings.¹⁸¹ In the summer of 2008, the photographer Pétur Thomsen was commissioned by the National Museum of Iceland to: “shed light on contemporary society in Iceland.”¹⁸² He chose to portray the structures of a new neighbourhood in Hafnarfjörður located around the mountain Ásfjall. The photographs show half-built houses in a rural area that is slowly being transformed into an urban environment. The series becomes a highly interesting example which comments on the events of the crash in a meta-critical way, as the project was discontinued soon after it had started due to the economic collapse.¹⁸³ As very accurate photorealist drawings whose production took without a doubt many hours of detailed work, Ketilsson’s drawings add a layer of endurance and temporality to the half-built houses theme, that evokes the labour

¹⁷⁹ Royle, *The Uncanny*, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Royle, 1; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), section 358.

¹⁸¹ Hrafnkell Sigurðarsson, Berglind Jóna Hlynsdóttir and Pétur Thomsen, to name but a few, have all photographed the half-built crash houses.

¹⁸² From the website: <http://www.peturthomsen.is/asfjall/>

¹⁸³ Pétur Thomsen, *Ásfjall*, 2008.

process not only of creating the artwork, but also building the structure portrayed. *Waiting*, the series of photographs by Ragnarsson, portrays the process of the crash in a way that highlights the constant dynamics, expansion, movement, as well as the singular moments of waiting, in the urban space, and how this dynamic process works towards forgetting rather than remembering. But then again, how does spectrality fit within this idea of memory and space? A haunted place implies how an area or a location preserves a memory that has been silenced, forgotten, repressed, or perhaps a counter-memory that the inhabitants of the city are not aware of. If modernity and the modern city support forgetting, spectrality supports the opposite, encourages subjects to slow down, pause and remember, and perhaps to remember differently from before, by being conscious of how memory is manifold, differentiated, even contradictory at times. In this sense spectrality, and the moment of spectral mourning, has a similar potential to the newly conceptualised form of melancholia: to encourage critical reflection and possible reform in order to work towards a better future. But it is up to the melancholics, the human subjects who are in nostalgic mourning, to use the spectral moment constructively.

Spectral memories and the financial crisis: concluding remarks

In this second part of the thesis I have discussed how the cultural response to the events of crash and crisis reflect spectral and uncanny aesthetics, and in particular, the creation of spectral spaces and locations, both in literature as well as in visual art. The haunted house in genre fiction becomes an exaggerated environment of anxiety, and a space that is very obviously threatening towards the human subjects of the story. The uncanny locations in the novel *Hvítfeld*, and the spectral spaces portrayed in the drawings and photographs discussed in chapter four, are also threatening towards their subjects, but in a more subtle way. These are spaces that arouse anxiety, and refer to the collective fear of the period of losing one's home, which represents the fear of losing oneself, hence the *chez soi* concept discussed by Daisy Connan, that highlights the connection between the home and the self.¹⁸⁴ In the context of the crash, the fear of losing oneself is brought to the collective domain and understood as being a fear of losing one's identity, or rather one's national identity, since people feared that Iceland would lose its economic independence during the crash and crisis, and with it their collective cultural memories based on pride and heroism. The spectral and uncanny aesthetics, of both literary fiction as well as visual art, respond to, and reproduce, a melancholic state which relates to this form of spectral mourning; a mourning that persists and does not come to an end for several reasons. Since no one is ready to take the blame for the causes of the economic crash, and people do not agree on where the responsibility lies, it is not possible to work through the loss, fully comprehend it and finalise it, in order to continue towards the future. However, the mourning also persists because people do not entirely understand what it is they are mourning, which emphasises the different impacts of the crash on people's lives. For some, the period of crisis meant mourning their former life, for others grieving the loss of a bright future, and for yet others the mourning process was initiated by something more ambiguous and abstract, such as the loss of a collective ideal in the form of a heroic national identity to live up to. For yet others, the downfall of the heroic ideal was a cause for celebration, considering that such a stereotype is essentially exclusive and disjointed for the many members of the different cultural groups in Icelandic society that do not identify with that ideal and image. The uncanny aesthetics and spectral themes of the artworks analysed, crime fiction, family saga/novel, as well series of drawings and photographs, become important testimonies to the period and important memorials of the post-crash society. In that sense, both the artworks and the literature

¹⁸⁴ Connan, *Subjects Not-at-home*, 11.

highlight the function of art and literature for cultural memory, as they memorialise collective events on the scale of the crash and crisis.

I have not discussed the reconstruction of Icelandic society in the years after the crisis, but focused on the period of crisis, and the artistic responses that were constructed during that time. As stated in the introduction to *Iceland's Financial Crisis*, Iceland's financial system has mostly recovered, while the politics/politicians have not completely regained public confidence.¹⁸⁵ The recovery is mostly credited to the tourist boom and the rise in tourists' interest in travelling to Iceland in the years from 2012 to early 2020, when the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic stopped the tourist business altogether. The great emphasis on tourism in contemporary Icelandic society proposes yet more questions about conflicts of identity and how Icelanders portray themselves in the eyes of the world. This highlights yet another aspect that Icelandic society has not really worked through after the collective shock of the crash, and how it led to both economic crisis as well as crisis of memory and identity. The idea of the ironic after-knowledge created by the crash draws attention to the need for critical reflection and awareness when creating images of what it means to be Icelandic, and when using cultural memory when constructing ideas on national identity. I would like to end this part by coming back to the concept of spectrality. While Freud emphasises the need to exorcise the uncanny and cleanse it of ghosts, as a way for people to be rid of their fears and anxieties, the ghost in spectrality should remain, in order to learn how to live with it, instead of trying to have it expelled. I would therefore like to ask that the spectres of the crash and crisis are allowed to remain, in order to open up for the possibility to spectralise or problematise any fixed ideas on cultural memory, national identity and what it means to be Icelandic.

¹⁸⁵ "As the people's demand, during a mass protest in spring 2016, for the resignation of Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, who was in the Panama Papers, has shown." Valur Ingimundarson, Philippe Urfalino, Irma Erlingsdóttir, "Introduction" in *Iceland's Financial Crisis*, 2.

Spectral Memories of Icelandic Culture:

Memory, Identity and the Haunted Imagination in Contemporary Literature and Art

Conclusion

I started the introduction to this thesis by recollecting two classic ghost stories from the Icelandic cultural heritage: the story of Glámur in the *Saga of Grettir* from the medieval sagas, a key cultural memory in Iceland, as well as the story of the new-born that is left outside to die and returns after its death to haunt its mother. The latter is known from folktale collections, and is also an important Icelandic cultural memory, as every child in Iceland learns about these in school. The aim of opening the thesis with these two classical stories of hauntings was to demonstrate how rich and profound the haunted imagination of Icelandic cultural memory actually is, as well as to explain how spectral beings are equated with enemies in the Icelandic context, and how their presence is, first and foremost, unwelcomed and undesired. By employing Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology, and by using spectralities as a theoretical framework, I sought to establish the possibility of approaching this kind of ghost-narratives as possible memory-narratives: Where the ghost signals the return of a repressed memory that asks to be recollected and remembered.

The spectral return offers a transformative and dynamic memory encounter, as the spectre, states Derrida, returns with a message, asking living subjects to reconsider how they have read the past so far, as well as to critically reflect on how they use memory and their readings of the past as a way of constructing and conceiving the present. This allows me to establish a link between hauntings, or more precisely memory that is haunted, and identity, as I sought to use my case studies to explore the ways in which the spectre returns to critique or supplement the self, on the personal as well as the collective level, in terms of nationhood and national identity. The thesis is in this sense ethical-political in its orientation, as my analysis aims at unfolding how the artworks encode critiques or politics of memory and identity, from various collective and individual perspectives, and through a range of different themes that all come together in the following research questions stated in the introduction: How does the spectre express the contradictions and paradoxes that lie at the heart of Icelandic cultural memories, and how is this related to the *fear* usually associated with spectral beings? How do spectral spaces, such as damaged official buildings of power, haunted houses, homes and ruins, express identities that are haunted? How can melancholia and repression, expressed by the

presence of the spectre, be transformed into its opposite, allowing subjects to explore the potentiality of the spectral return as a dynamic memory encounter?

The spectral memories explored in the thesis span a broad spectrum: from the institutional archives of the archival art pieces in chapter one to the hidden intergenerational memories of the families in the novels of chapter two, and the contested memories of the financial crash in chapters three and four, that refuse to be forgotten and persist in spectral forms. However, strong connections between these diverse memories can be drawn explicitly. The archival art pieces address the public image of cultural memory which becomes foundational in the construction of collective identities, such as national identities. The memories presented by the two artists are visual images that provide different perspectives on Icelandic national identity, other than the one which is usually celebrated as being unified, proud and heroic. Nordal's series of photos, *Musée Islandique* and *Das Experiment Island*, conjure up spectres of colonial memory in Iceland, raising questions on the status of the nation in terms of imperialism. As historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson maintains, Iceland cannot be defined as having been a colony in the nineteenth-century meaning of the term, since it did not in any way experience the same degree of violence and exploitation as the colonies of the global south, or its neighbouring nation Greenland.¹⁸⁶ However, at the height of the imperialist era Iceland was under foreign rule and was perceived over the years as an uncivilised “exotic” part of a remote territory. This creates a paradox which lies at the heart of the collective psyche of Icelanders and their cultural memories: while they almost desperately seek to side with colonisers and the former imperialist empires, and to rank high in the political and cultural hierarchy of the world, history shows that they are in fact very far from that position.

This tension, expressed so powerfully in Nordal's series, creates a strong link to the politics of memory and identity during the period of crash and crisis discussed in chapter three. It is closely related to the anxieties brought on by the crash, that Aleric Hall terms *post-colonial anxiety*. For Hall the crash manifested the repressed fear among Icelanders of being a culturally inferior nation and an economic subordinate to other, more wealthy and powerful nations. The post-colonial anxiety in times of crash and crisis elucidates how Icelanders desire to rank high in the global hierarchy of the Western world, and that other nations should perceive them as a civilised and culturally interesting nation among nations.¹⁸⁷ The crash therefore represented not only a complete collapse of the economic system, as well as of politics and diplomacy, but also

¹⁸⁶ Hálfðanarson, “Var Ísland nýlenda?” 70.

¹⁸⁷ Hall, *Útrásavíkingar!*, 48.

initiated a turning point for the proud and heroic cultural memory Icelanders had constructed for themselves, and so firmly believed in.

In a similar way, Unnar Örn Auðarson's black-and-white photographs of protests from different times in Icelandic history, *Traces*, discussed in chapter one, were juxtaposed with public images of cultural memory during the exhibition *Fragments of the Deeds of Unrest: Part II*. This specific association of different mnemonic images demonstrates the many contested memories hidden behind the surface of official cultural memory. The exhibition relates strongly to the mnemonic disruption created by the economic collapse. First by exhibiting scenes from protests and images of damaged buildings of authority that speak strongly to the pots and pans revolution following the crash, and I discussed in chapter three. It undermines the national image of being heroic and unified, as it *frames* the tensions inherent in Icelandic cultural memory that are usually concealed but manifested themselves violently and publicly during the crash and crisis. The crash represents a defining moment for cultural memory in Iceland, as its dynamic and negotiable aspects are exposed, illustrating how people can disagree about memory. The crash exposed how memory is filled with conflicts and contradictions, struggles, opposite viewpoints and contested issues, and how it is based on power hierarchies, raising questions as to who actually *allows* memories to be remembered, even celebrated, and others to be silenced and quietly forgotten.

Hvítfeld, the family saga discussed in chapter three, deals with the identity politics of the crash on the level of the individual, by presenting a narrative where family members are not accepted by their relatives if they do not conform to the family identity and the patriarchal legacy of the family. The historical long view of the novel exemplifies the workings of repression, and how melancholia is inherited from one generation to the other. The novel strongly echoes the narratives of the two works of archival fiction discussed in chapter two, *Fórnarleikar* and *Elín, ýmislegt*, that deal with the archive on the intergenerational memory level of the family. Both stories focus on how memories are inherited materially through objects, stored for example in boxes in attics, and are passed on from one family member to the other. Or, to be more precise, the two novels rather address the *failure* of the archive to pass on memories that are problematic, demonstrating how traumas, or other difficult and contested memories, are transmitted secretly or unconsciously between generations, and in spectral forms. Repression is also of utmost importance for the horror story *I Remember You*, indicating how it can turn everyday houses and conventional homes into dangerous and threatening settings, forcing the characters who reside within the haunted space to face the ghosts of the past which,

metaphorically speaking, means taking on the responsibility to settle the secrets and unsettled matters that have, to the present day, been silenced and repressed. The characters of the horror novel are all stuck in a melancholic state: unable to admit their guilt, face their responsibility and use the spectral moment to think beyond their nostalgic feelings towards the past and work towards a better future.

The haunted houses of the ghost story are given visual representation in the untitled series of drawings by Guðjón Ketilsson and in *Waiting*, a series of photos by Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson discussed in the final chapter. Ketilsson portrays with pencil on paper and in precise detail the half-built houses whose construction came to a halt with the crash, while Ragnarsson's series portrays the stasis of the urban space during the crisis following the fast economic growth of the boom years, and how whole neighbourhoods were left half-built, exposed and almost dystopic during the period. Both series express how this period in time of Icelandic history became a moment of haunting, and how the bare, empty and ghostly houses and buildings of the cityscape are capitalist ruins, echoing strongly and concretely the ideological ruin of the times.

The two series evoke the strong symbolic function of space, houses and homes that is the continuous theme throughout the thesis; where the house becomes a concrete representation for identity, and where the haunted house implies memory that is haunted. The damaged government buildings in the images from *Traces* imply how the national memory is haunted, therefore suggesting that the national identity is damaged or hurt, and the family houses in the archival fictions are haunted by the repressed family secrets, which has implications for the identity of family members in the present. The self-made house of the main character Elín in the novel *Elín, ýmislegt*, discussed in chapter two, becomes an existential symbol and a foundational symbol for her identity as a self-made woman: a woman who is not dependent on her past nor the legacy of her absent family. Elín's renovations appear as a form of exorcism as she thoroughly describes the process of stripping the house to its bare state before rebuilding it, as a way to rid the space of all ghosts and past memories and imprint her own fingerprints on the house's material. This act illustrates how she refuses to let her childhood memories and her familial background dominate her selfhood, and how she uses her own agency, autonomy and performativity to decide for herself who she wants to be. This narrative path of the house-as-identity connects strongly to the haunted houses of the crash, and to the novels discussed in chapter three where the hauntings exemplify how the characters would do well to follow Elín's example: to face the ghosts of the past, unravel the trauma residing in the concrete space of the

houses, in order to work towards a reconciliation. In that way they would be able to reconsider the workings of memory and understand how the repressed memories of the past impact the identities of the present: how memory lays the ground for constructing identity, on the collective and individual level.

This brings us to the politics of identity, and how haunted memory signals the need for reconsidering identity construction in terms of selfhood as well as nationhood. Here the possibility of the spectral return as a transformative memory encounter is highlighted as a way of encouraging living subjects to use the temporal disjointedness of the spectre – the melancholic moment of crisis and loss – to reflect critically on the past and work towards a better future. This opens up the following question: why is the business Viking so problematic as the representative image of Icelandic national identity? Firstly, because it is based on a nationalist myth that is far from the truth and is blatantly hurtful and excluding, as it gives a very stereotypical and homogeneous image of what it means to be Icelandic. The fall of the business Viking ideal during the crash and crisis offers an opportunity to examine how identity is constructed and how cultural memory is based on paradoxes, contradictions and tensions which I discussed in the analysis of the two crisis novels in chapter three, *I Remember You* and *Hvítfeld: Family history*.

The deconstruction of the business Viking ideal highlights the gender tensions of cultural memory. As Sigríður Matthíasdóttir illustrates, heroism is at the heart of cultural memory in Iceland, that lays the foundation for national identity and the national image of the business Viking. Here it is, however, not the everyday heroism of women, but the institutionalised heroism of men, the masculine ideal, as it was, according to the public narrative, the men who proudly fought for the independence of the country.¹⁸⁸ The question of gender in public remembrance is addressed in *Elín, ýmislegt*. One of the few male heroes in the story is the writer Álfur Finnsson, whose legacy is turned into an institutionalised cultural memory, as his literary works are allotted their firm place in the canon, in Icelandic literary history, and his house is turned into a museum. The latter reinstates the symbolic function of the house in narratives and in images as representative for identity and memory, where the haunted house signifies haunted memory and thus disrupted identity. This applies to Álfur as a cultural memory, as his mistress and illegitimate child are not mentioned in the public memory narratives associated with his legacy. The mistress and love-child therefore acquire the status of ghosts or spectres that haunt the house-museum and the memory it represents. In contrast to

¹⁸⁸ Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*, 371-372.

the institutionalised memory of Álfur, Elín discusses how women are not remembered for their everyday heroism; of sustaining the everyday by taking care of houses and children (present-day identity and the future), while the men go on performing more memorable heroic actions. In this context and simply stated, men appear to be at the forefront of cultural memory (the canon), while the lives of women are in the background (archive).

This contradiction, heroism either celebrated or forgotten, highlights the need for *spectralising* the cultural memory: allowing for the spectral return to take place as a possible transformative and dynamic memory encounter, to conjure up the repressed counter memories that have, until now, not been allowed to be formally part of the unified national memory. The analysis of the different case studies in the thesis elucidates how this may be done: by projecting a spectral reading onto the communal cultural memory and allowing what is absent and haunting to come to the fore. The drawings by Ketilsson, for example, complicate the idea of collective mourning following the crash, since they disrupt the idea of the nation as a unity, and of a unified cultural group behind the fixed and homogenous cultural identity, by evoking the migrant worker who physically built the structure portrayed in the drawing. The worker is not present in the picture and his absence creates a spectral situation of haunting. The drawings raise questions about his status in the pre-crash society, as well as his whereabouts and role in the post-crash period. In a similar destabilising fashion, the images of protests that artist Unnar Örn Auðarson draws from different archives draw attention to the many contested memories hiding behind the sleek surface of the public cultural memory, and emphasise the many possibilities of spectralising that public image.

This is the core of *spectral mourning*, which stresses the possibility of using the crisis, as a period following a collective shock, even panic, constructively and critically. The spectral return stays with the subject during the process of spectral mourning, and becomes haunting, providing an important moment for reflection, which becomes vital after a severe shipwreck such as the crash, in order to re-examine the collective cultural ideals that are predominant in society, as well as the need to be more humble, critical and multivocal in consideration of collective identities and national representations. In this sense, spectral mourning paves the way for *memory activism*, which I discussed in chapter one, and for the act of cultivating counter-memory in order to take part in future remembrance, and influence how the past as well as the present moment will be valued in the future.¹⁸⁹ This last point harmonises perfectly with the future emphasis of spectrality that I keep coming to: the idea of the spectre as an *arrivant* who

¹⁸⁹ Gutman, *Memory Activism*, 2 and Rigney, “Remembering Hope”, 372.

is capable of announcing what is yet to come. When discussing memory one tends to become stuck in an orientation towards the past, thinking that memory only has to do with past events and ancient objects. Memory is, on the contrary, of immense value for the present, for example in present-day politics of identity, and in consideration of the diversity of cultural groups behind the national identity and image. The act of changing how identity is perceived and constructed thus strongly affects the future, and contributes to the reconsideration of who is allowed to be part of the public representation of what it means to be Icelandic. Viewed in this way, memory holds an immense social importance for contemporary debates over identity, equality, migration and other urgent issues of the globalised present.

Samantekt

Í ritgerðinni rannsaka ég *vofulegar minningar* í íslenskri menningu og skoða flókið samspil minnis, sjálfsmyndar og reimleika í samtímabókmenntatextum og myndlistarverkum. Ég beiti hugtakinu „vofulegar“ til að skilgreina minningar sem af ólíkum ástæðum hafa gleymst, verið þaggðar eða niðurbældar í sameiginlegri menningarvitund þjóðarinnar, en hafa snúið aftur fyrir augu almennings fyrir tilstilli samtímabókmennta og myndlistar. Vofufræði (e. spectrality theory), og verk franska heimspekingsins Jacques Derrida, *Vofur Marx*, eru upphafspunktur rannsóknarinnar, með það að leiðarljósi að tengja vofuna við hugmyndir um minni og kenningar í menningarlegum minnisfræðum (e. cultural memory studies).¹⁹⁰ Í verkinu lýsir Derrida hvernig vofan rís upp frá dauðum og snýr aftur í heim lifenda til að koma á framfæri ákveðnum skilaboðum, og hvernig það er siðferðileg skylda þeirra sem staddir eru í samtímanum að hlýða á vofuna og stofna til samtals við hana:

Hann [fræðimaður framtíðarinnar, menntamaður morgundagsins] ætti að læra að lifa, með því að læra ekki hvernig á að reyna að halda uppi samræðum við drauginn, heldur hvernig á að tala við hann, við hana, hvernig eigi að láta þau tala eða gefa þeim aftur orðið, jafnvel þó að hann sé í sjálfum sér, í hinum, í hinu sjálfinu: Þær eru alltaf þarna, vofurnar, jafnvel þó þær séu ekki til, jafnvel þó þær séu ekki lengur, jafnvel þó þær séu ekki ennþá.¹⁹¹

Viðhorf Derrida stingur í stúf við almennar reimleikafrásagnir í vestrænum heimi þar sem draugurinn er yfirleitt álitinn óvinur hins lifandi manns, og þar sem markmiðið er ávallt að kveða hann niður, losna við hann og óþægilega nærveru hans í heimi lifenda. Þýski sálgreinirinn Sigmund Freud leitaðist enn fremur við að skilgreina ótta mannsins við drauga í ritgerðinni „Hið óhugnanlega“ og tengir fyrirbærið við bælingu: „Þetta óhugnanlega er í rauninni ekkert nýtt eða framandi, heldur eitthvað, sem er handgengið og gamalkunnugt í huganum, en hefur einungis fjarlægst hann við bælingu.“¹⁹² Derrida notar drauginn sem myndlíkingu fyrir þögguð mál sem

¹⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, þýð. Peggy Kamuf, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁹¹ „He [the ‘scholar’ of the future, the ‘intellectual of tomorrow’] should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.“ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, ens. þýð. Kamuf, 221. Íslensk þýðing mín.

¹⁹² Sigmund Freud, „Hið óhugnanlega“ í *Listir og listamenn*, þýð. og ritstj. Sigurjón Björnsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2004), 219.

koma illa við þá sem lifa í samtímanum. Í íslenskri menningu má finna mýmörg dæmi um drauga og vofur, en reimleikar skapa áberandi og ansi öflugan þráð í sagnarfi Íslendinga sem er mjög skýrt dæmi um menningarlegt minni. Eins og á við um draugasögur almennt í hinni vestrænu hefð, er draugurinn í íslenskum sagnaarfi yfirleitt tengdur hinu illa sem kveða verður niður og losna við. Í ljósi hugmynda um minni og minnisfræði, verður draugurinn því að viðeigandi tákni eða myndlíkingu fyrir eitthvað sem kemur úr fortíðinni, skapar kvíða og ótta hjá þeim sem dvelja í samtímanum, því hann og skilaboðin sem hann ber með sér falla ekki að ríkjandi hugmyndum í samtímanum.

Esther Peeren, menningarráðgjafi á sviði vofufræða, leggur áherslu á að greina séreinkenni hvers draugs fyrir sig því ekki eru allir draugar eins; þeir geta verið missýnilegir, áhrifamiklir og hafa ólíka frásagnarvirkni í sögum af reimleikum.¹⁹³ Þá er mikilvægt að gera greinarmun á orðunum „draugur“ og „vofa“, en fyrrnefnda hugtakið er fremur hlaðið neikvæðri merkingu á meðan það seinna er öllu hlutlausara og gefur betur til kynna ósýnileika; eitthvað eða einhvern sem aðeins sést að hluta til. Þetta á einnig við um íslenskar draugasögur og sem dæmi, til að nefna ólíkar gerðir reimleika sem hafa ólík áhrif, vísa ég í inngangi að ritgerðinni í tvær mjög þekktar vofulegar verur úr íslenskum sagnarfi. Sú fyrri birtist sem dæmigerður „draugur“ en það er Glámur úr Grettissögu, fyrrum vinnumaður sem rís upp frá dauðum og snýr aftur sem ofbeldisfullur, reiður og mjög líkamlegur „sombí“-draugur, til að skapa glundroða og eyðileggingu í heimi lifenda. Að Grettir nái tókum á honum sannar hetjuskap hans, en verður einnig til þess að honum fylgir ákveðin bölvun ævina á enda. Seinni vofulega veran minnir meira á hugmyndina um „vofuna“, en það er útburðurinn, afar óhugnalegt og tragískt minni í íslenskum þjóðsagnaarfi, en flest skólabörn á Íslandi kannast við söguna *Móðir mín í kví kví*. Hér birtist draugurinn ekki móður sinni í efnislegri mynd heldur kemur skilaboðum sínum á framfæri með óápreifanlegri röddinni en áhrifin leyna sér ekki; unga móðirin sturlast við að heyra rödd barnsins. Hér má velta fyrir sér hvort útburðurinn verði að tákni fyrir djúpstætt samviskubit, trúmatíska minningu sem neitar að falla í gleymsku og ásækir móðurina þangað til hún missir vitið. Þessar tvær sögur nefni ég í tvennum tilgangi. Í fyrsta lagi til að sýna fram á hversu áberandi draugar og reimleikar eru í íslenskum sagnarfi, nánast með þeim hætti að íslenskir lesendur taka varla eftir þeim, og í öðru lagi til að sýna fram á hvernig draugurinn og vofan eru yfirleitt tengd við eitthvað illt og eitthvað sem þarf að losna við. En hvernig tengjast þessar óhugnanlegu verur sem skapa hræðslu, minni, minningum og sjálfmynd?

¹⁹³ Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and The Agency of Invisibility* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 12.

Eins og áður sagði lýsir hugtakið menningarlegt minni hvernig þeir sem eru staddir í samtímanum velja ákveðnar minningar, ákveðin atriði úr sameiginlegri fortíð, til þess að skilgreina samtímann, og skapa og styðja við menningarlega sjálfsmynd. Sem dæmi má nefna hvernig Íslendingar skilgreina sig sem einn heilstæðan menningarhóp (þjóð) á alþjóðavettangi. Menningarleg minnisfræði lýsa þverfræðilegum rannsóknum á minni, hvernig minni verður til og hvernig því er miðlað innan samfélags eða á sviði menningar. Fræðasviðið á rætur að tekja til hugmynda Maurice Halbwachs um *sameiginlegt minni* (e. collective memory) frá þriðja áratug síðustu aldar.¹⁹⁴ Hugtak Halbwachs lýsir því hvernig minni er fyrst og fremst félagslegt fyrirbæri sem byggir á samskiptum, og hvernig einstaklingar læra að muna fyrir tilstilli félagslegra þátta, eins og tungumála, siða og venja. Á níunda áratugnum taka fræðimenn að kynna hugmyndir Halbwachs inn á svið menningarfræða, þar á meðal Assmann hjónin, Aleida og Jan, sem ennfremur greina sameiginlegt minni í tvennt; annars vegar samskiptaminni (e. communicative memory) og hins vegar menningarlegt minni (e. cultural memory).¹⁹⁵ Menningarlega minnið er stofnavætt minni og samanstendur af ólíkum *minnisvettvöngum* (e. memory site; f. lieux de mémoire) sé stuðst við hugtak Pierre Nora, sem á við um atriði, óhlutbundin jafnt sem hlutbundin, eins og staði, hluti, listaverk, bókmenntir, ártöl og dagsetningar, sem verða að menningarlegum táknum, endurspeglar minningu og leggja grunninn að menningarlegri sjálfsmynd.¹⁹⁶ Jan Assmann leggur ríka áherslu á hlutverk og virkni menningarlegs minnis fyrir menningarlega sjálfsmynd:

Hugmyndin um menningarlegt minni felur í sér heild endurnýtanlegra texta, mynda og siða í tilteknu samfélagi á tilteknum tíma, og „ræktun“ þeirra þjónar þeim tilgangi að festa í sessi og tjá sjálfsmynd þess tiltekna samfélags. Sérhver hópur byggir á þess háttar sameiginlegri þekkingu á fortíðinni, að mestu leyti (en ekki eingöngu), meðvitund sína um einingu og sérkenni.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ritstj. þýð. og inngangur eftir Lewis A. Coser, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁹⁵ Jan Assmann, „Communicative and Cultural Memory“, *Cultural Memory Studies. An Interdisciplinary and International Handbook*, eds. A. Erll and A. Nünning, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). Marion Lerner hefur skrifað um aðgreiningarkenningu Assmann hjónanna í *Ritinu*. Sjá „Staðir og menningarlegt minni. Um ferðalýsingar og vörður“, *Ritið* 1/2013 (Minni og gleymaska), 9–28.

¹⁹⁶ Pierre Nora, „Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire“ í *Memory and Counter-Memory*, eds. Natalie Zemon Davis og Randolph Starn, *Representations* 26 (1989), 7–24.

¹⁹⁷ „The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.“ Jan Assmann, „Collective Memory and Cultural Identity“ þýð. John Czaplicka. *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33, 132.

Skilgreining Assmanns sýnir hvernig menningarhópar byggja einingu sína á sameiginlegum minningum og því að minnast ákveðinna atburða og atriða úr sameiginlegri fortíð. Þegar ég tengi vofufræði við menningarleg minnisfræði verður Vofan að myndlíkingu fyrir ákveðna gerð af minningu, eða öllu heldur „blinda bletti“ minnis; frásögn úr fortíð sem ekki er leyft að festa rætur í minninu og verða að minningu sem haldið er til haga, en jafnframt frásögn sem neitar með öllu að falla í gleymsku; þrjóskastríð, gefur sig ekki, og verður því áfram til staðar en í „vofulegu“ formi. En hvernig geta gleymdar minningar skapað reimleika, þ.e. öðlast getuna til að ásækja samtímann og minnt þannig hressilega á sig? Ég færi rök fyrir því að vofan geti stofnað til uppbyggjandi og gagnrýnna minnisviðtaka, en aðeins ef vofunni er leyft að minna á sig og ef við í samtímanum gefum henni færi á að stíga fram í dagsljósið og trufla þá mynd sem við höfum, fram til þessa, gefið okkur af fortíðinni. Í ritgerðinni fjalla ég um verk rithöfunda og listamanna sem leyfa vofunni að stíga fram úr skugga geymslunnar og inn á opinbert svið bókmennta og myndlistar.

Endurkoma vofunnar leggur grunninn að gagnrýnum minnisviðtökum, þar sem viðtakandi, sem staðsettur er í samtímanum, tekur við minningum fortíðar, greinir þær og skilur með gagnrýnum hætti með það að leiðarljósi að leggja grunninn að sanngjarnari og réttmætari framtíð. Að þessu leyti fellur hugmyndin um vofuna vel að nýlegum áherslum í menningarlegum minnisfræðum um *hreyfanleika* (e. dynamics) menningarlega minnisins og hvernig minnisvettvangur er ekki óbreytanlegur fasti heldur tekur stöðugum breytingum. Ann Rigney skrifar til að mynda um *minnisferli* (e. mnemonic process) sem hún skilgreinir á eftirfarandi hátt: „Minnisvettvangur er stöðugt gæddur nýrri merkingu og verður að sjálfvarðveitandi hringiðu táknrænnar merkingar.“¹⁹⁸ Hugmyndin um hreyfanleika minnis leggur ennfremur áherslu á þátt gleymskunnar og hvernig minni byggist í raun á því að muna og gleyma; því um leið og við veljum að minnast ákveðinna atburða eða atriða, veljum við að gleyma öðrum. Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir skrifar til dæmis: „Til þess að muna, verður að gleyma; hið gleymda er ávallt nú þegar órjúfanlegur hluti af minni.“¹⁹⁹ Aleida Assmann segir ennfremur að í samtímanum sé gleymaska talsvert algengari en minni, hún sé í raun norm í nútímasamfélagi þar sem það að muna verður að kostnaðarsamri undantekningu í formi

¹⁹⁸ „Sites of memory are constantly being reinvested with new meaning’ and thus ‘be-come a self-perpetuation vortex of symbolic investment.“ Ann Rigney, „Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory“, *Journal of European Studies*, 1/2005, 11–28, 18. Íslensk þýðing mín.

¹⁹⁹ „In order to remember, one must have forgotten; the forgotten is always already an integral part of memory.“ Guðmundsdóttir, *Representations of Forgetting*, 1.

stofnana, safna, regluverks og minnisvarða.²⁰⁰ Paul Connerton gengur jafnvel svo langt að segja að nútíminn byggi á og stefni að gleysku en hann gerir einnig greinarmun á ólíkum gerðum gleysku, tekur alls sjö dæmi sem ýmist sýna neikvæðar hliðar gleyskunnar eða uppbyggilegar.²⁰¹ Rannsóknin leiddi mig annars vegar að gleymdum minningum fortíðar sem snúa aftur og trufla ríkjandi, einsleitar og staðnaðar hugmyndir um sjálfsmynd, og hins vegar að sögulegum tímabilum og atburðum sem getið hafa af sér vofulegar minningar. Fyrri hluti ritgerðarinnar rannsakar hvernig arkífið eða skjalasafnið (e. archive) verður að geymslustað vofulegra minninga; en fjöldamargar opinberar stofnanir geyma minningar í geymslum sínum, sem ekki eru alla jafna til sýnis á opinberum vettvangi, og fjalla til að mynda um nýlendusögu Íslendinga, óeirðir og mótmæli. Þegar þær eru dregnar fram í dagsljósið, birta þessar minningar annars konar mynd af sameiginlegri sjálfsmynd þjóðarinnar en þá sem iðulega birtist opinberlega. Í seinni hluta ritgerðarinnar beini ég sjónum að efnhagshruninu árið 2008 og hvernig það leiddi af sér vofulegar minningar; bókmenntatexta og myndlistarverk sem fjalla um reimleika með einum eða öðrum hætti. Þá fjalla ég einnig um það hvernig efnhagshrunið leiddi ekki aðeins til fjármálakreppu, heldur einnig til menningarlegrar minnis- og sjálfsmyndarkrísu; ákveðins uppgjors á hvernig Íslendingar nota menningararfinn, til dæmis víkingaarfleifð, til að skapa þjóðarímynd heima fyrir og til kynningar á alþjóðavettvangi. Í báðum hlutum greini ég frásagnir og myndir sem reynast ásóttar af niðurbældum minningum sem hefur áhrif á hvernig sjálfsmynd er mótuð í samtímanum, og sýnir fram á þau þétta en flóknu tengsl á milli minnis, sjálfsmyndar og reimleika.

Fyrri hlutinn skiptist í tvo kafla. Fyrsti kafli fjallar um myndlistarverk tveggja listamanna, þeirra Ólafar Nordal og Unnars Arnar, sem draga efnivið sinn úr arkífunni, skjalasafni opinberra stofnanna.²⁰² Ljósmyndaraðir Ólafar, *Musée Islandique* og *Das Experiment Island* voru til sýnis á Listasafni Íslands árið 2012 og birta rannsóknargögn úr tveimur mannfræðirannsóknnum sem gerðar hafa verið á Íslendingum og sýna þá í ljósi hugmynda um nýlendustefnu. Myndirnar vekja upp þær nýlenduminningar sem tengjast Íslandi og alla jafna er ekki mikið rætt um; um stöðu Íslands sem nýlendu og staðsetningu í flóknu stigveldi þjóða á tímum heimsveldisstefnu. Þá vekja myndirnar einnig upp umræðu um tengsl skjalasafnsins við hugmyndir nýlendustefnu almennt, sem og þau vofulegu og heldur

²⁰⁰ Aleida Assmann, „Canon and Archive“ in *Cultural Memory Studies. An Interdisciplinary and International Handbook*, ritstj. A. Erll and A. Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 97-108, 98.

²⁰¹ Paul Connerton, „Seven Types of Forgetting“; Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁰² Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique* og *Das Experiment Island*. Ljósmyndaraðir, 2012.

Unnar Örn Auðarson, *Brotabrot úr afrekasögu óeirðar: II. Hluti*, sýning í listasal ASÍ 2014.

óhuganlegu hugrenningatengsl sem skjalasafnið býr yfir og skapar. Seinna verkið sem ég greini í þessum fyrsta kafla er eftir Unnar Örn og er einnig ljósmyndaröð. Verkið nefnist „Vegsummerki“ og birtist á sýningunni *Brotabrot í afrekasögu óeirðar: II. hluti* í Listasal ASÍ árið 2014. Myndirnar koma úr ólíkum skjalasöfnum og sýna eftirleik mótmæla frá ólíkum tímum á Íslandi, en á einni þeirra má til dæmis virða fyrir sér Alþingishúsið með brotna glugga og sviðna jörð eftir Nato óeirðirnar árið 1949. Á sýningunni stillir listamaðurinn myndunum upp andspænis opinberum ímyndum úr menningarlegu minni og skapar þar með ákveðna togstreitu á milli þess sýnilega og ósýnilega; á milli kanónunnar og arkífsins, hinnar opinberu ásjónu menningarlega minnisins og bakgrunns þess. Í þessum fyrsta kafla er athyglin á hinu stofananvædda minni og opinberri sameiginlegri sjálfsmynd. Í öðrum kafla færast áherslan yfir á bókmenntir og á fjölskylduminni sem gengur þvert á kynslóðir. Hvernig erfast vofulegar minningar og hvaða áhrif hefur það á sjálfsmynd fjölskyldumeðlima í samtímanum? Fyrri skáldsagan sem ég fjalla um og greini er *Fórnarleikar* (2016) eftir Álfrúnu Gunnlaugsdóttur sem segir frá rithöfundinum er finnur fyrir slysi gamlar kassetur uppi á háaloftri í húsinu sínu og reynast geyma viðtöl sem móðir hans tók mörgum árum fyrir við ýmsa meðlimi fjölskyldunnar.²⁰³ Seinni skáldsagan er *Elín, ýmislegt* (2017) eftir Kristínu Eiríksdóttur sem segir frá því hvernig barnæska aðalsöguhetjunnar ryðst inn á heimili hennar í formi þriggja pappakassa sem komu í leitirnar þegar æskuheimili hennar var selt og tæmt.²⁰⁴ Í báðum tilfellum knýja hinar vofulegu minningar söguhetjunnar til þess að horfast í augu við fortíðina og ná tökum á því hvernig hún skilgreinir sjálf þeirra og athafnir í samtímanum.

Seinni hluti ritgerðarinnar fjallar um vofulegar minningar fjármálahrunsins og skiptist einnig í tvo kafla. Þriðji kafla fjallar um tvær *hrunskáldsögur* sem birta reimleika á ólíkan hátt. *Ég man þig* eftir glæpasagnahöfundinum Yrsa Sigurðardóttur kom út í miðri fjármálakreppu árið 2010 og varð gríðarlega vinsæl.²⁰⁵ Sagan er meira í ætt við hrollvekjju eða draugasögu heldur en raunsæislega glæpasögu og segir frá því hvernig peningavandræði hafa leikið sögupersónurnar grátt og fengið þær til að takast á við það óbærilega verkefni að gera upp reimt hús, lengst úti á norðurhjá, á Hesteyri í Jökulfjörðum á Vestfjörðum. Í greiningunni skoða ég hvernig reimda húsið skírskotar til samfélagsástands á tímum efnhagskreppu; hvernig sögupersónurnar takast á við drauginn með afneitun og bælingu ábyrgðar, og leitast framur öllu við að halda áfram með sama hætti og fyrir hrun, sem að lokum verður þeim að falli. Seinni hrunskáldsagan er fjölskyldusagan *Hvítfeld* (2012) eftir Kristínu Eiríksdóttur sem fjallar um

²⁰³ Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir, *Fórnarleikar* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2016).

²⁰⁴ Kristín Eiríksdóttir, *Elín, ýmislegt* (Reykjavík, JPV útgáfa, 2017).

²⁰⁵ Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, *Ég man þig* (Reykjavík: Veröld, 2010).

hvernig skyndilegt fráfall yngstu dótturinnar skapar aðstæður reimleika og dregur fram hvernig fjölskyldulífið einkennist af bælingu og melankólíu.²⁰⁶ Fjórði kafli ritgerðarinnar fjallar um tvær sjónrænar seríur sem takast á við áhrif efnahagshrunsins í borgarlandslagi Reykjavíkur með nokkuð afdráttarlausum hætti. Nákvæmar og raunsæislegar teikningar Guðjóns Ketilssonar sýna hálfbyggð hús á tímum efnahagskreppu en framkvæmdum þeirra var hætt í miðjum kliðum í hruninu.²⁰⁷ *Biðstaða*, ljósmyndasería Ingvars Högna Ragnarssonar, sýnir vofuleg rými Reykjavíkur á tímum hrunsins.²⁰⁸ Saman gefa myndaraðirnar til kynna að sögulega tímabilið í kjölfar hrunsins hafi verið tímabil reimleika; þar sem niðurbæddar minningar, óuppgerð ábyrgð, reiði og skömm, leitast við að komast upp á yfirborð borgarrýmisins.

Þessi ólíku verk sem ég fjalla um og greini í ritgerðinni – myndlistarverk sem sækja efnivið sinn í opinber skjalasöfn, skáldsögur sem fjalla um heimilisskjalasafn fjölskyldunnar, hrun-hrollvekja, hrun-fjölskyldusaga um sorgarferli, teikningar og ljósmyndir af vofulegum húsum og rýmum – mynda breitt svið menningarlegra frásagna eða menningartexta sem birta vofulegt minni; minni sem haldið er reimleikum, er ásótt eða ásækir, og hefur áhrif á sjálfsmynd. Greining á þessum verkum leiðir í ljós þau þétta en flóknu tengsl sem liggja á milli minnis, sjálfsmyndar og reimleika. Það sem tengir verkin enn frekar er hvernig þau binda minni og reimleika í rými og með því að skapa eða gefa mynd af vofulegu minni: skemmdarverkin sem gerð hafa verið á opinberum byggingum á ljósmyndunum í verki Unnars Arnar gefa til kynna að hið stofnanavædda og opinbera minni er haldið reimleikum, að um það ríki ágreiningur; heimili fjölskyldnanna í verkunum í öðrum kafla eru haldin reimleikum og ásótt af þeim niðurbæddu tramatísku minningum sem þau geyma í geymslurýmum sínum, rétt eins og reimleikahús efnahagshrunsins í kafla þrjú, eru ásótt af niðurbæddri ábyrgð, sektarkennd og skömm. Jafnvel nýlenduminningarnar í verki Ólafar Nordal sýna hvernig stofnanir geyma vofulegar minningar í geymslum og kjöllurum, en myndaraðir Guðjóns Ketilssonar og Ingvars Högna af vofulegum rýmum, skrásetja sögulegt tímabil sem haldið er reimleikum. Hér verður hið vofulega rými að hlutbundnu tákni og að umgjörð fyrir minni sem hlaðið er reimleikum. Hið vofulega rými gefur því til kynna að eitthvað „er úr lið“ í samtímanum og að sú sjálfsmynd, sem styðst við hið vofulega minni, byggir á blekkingu og þarfnist gagnrýns endurmats.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Kristín Eiríksdóttir, *Hvítfeld: Fjölskyldusaga* (Reykjavík: JPV, 2012).

²⁰⁷ Guðjón Ketilsson, án titils, 2009.

²⁰⁸ Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, *Biðstaða*, frá 2006-.

²⁰⁹ „Öldin er úr lið“ eru orð Hamlets í leikriti Shakespeare en þau verða að leiðarstefi í texta Derrida, *Vofum Marx*, og lýsa því tímalega rofi eða skekkju sem verður til við nærveru vofunnar, nánar tiltekið þegar vofa föður Hamlets gengur aftur til að hvetja soninn til að hefna dauða hans.

Í öllum tilvikum sækist ég eftir að greina hvernig vofan snýr aftur frá fortíð til að trufla eða hafa áhrif á samtímann; hvernig vofan kallar eftir minnisviðtökum sem byggja á gagnrýni og hreyfanleika, með því að draga tengsl á milli reimleika og sjálfsmyndar, bæði á hinu persónulega sviði og hinu sameiginlega. Að þessu leyti svara verkin titli ritgerðarinnar með nokkuð afdráttarlausum hætti; *Vofulegar minningar í íslenskri menningu: minni, sjálfsmynd og reimleikar í samtímabókmenntum og myndlist*, með því að vera skapandi, listræn, skálduð og hugvitssöm menningarleg svör eða viðbrögð við minni sem haldið er reimleikum og hefur áhrif á hvernig sjálfsmynd er skynjuð og sett saman. Að þessu leyti hefur ritgerðin ákveðna siðferðilega og pólitíska vídd, þar sem greining mín miðar að því að leiða í ljós hvernig verkin bera í sér gagnrýni á minni og sjálfsmynd frá ólíkum sjónarhornum. Að þessu leiða nokkrar lykilspurningar sem leggja grunninn að rannsókninni og ég geri tilraun til að svara í ritgerðinni: Hvernig snýr vofan aftur til að gagnrýna hugmyndina um sjálf og sjálfsmynd, á persónulegu sviði jafnt sem hinu sameiginlega, í formi þjóðar og þjóðlegrar sjálfsmyndar? Hvernig tjá vofuleg rými, eins og laskaðar byggingar stjórnvaldsins, draugahús, heimili haldin reimleikum og rústir, sjálfsmyndir hlaðnar reimleikum? Hvernig tjáir vofan þær mótsagnir og þverstæður sem liggja íslenskum menningarlegum minningum til grundvallar, og hvernig tengist það *hræðslunni* sem yfirleitt er tengd við vofulegar verur eins og drauga? Hvernig getur melankólíu og bælingu, sem gefnar eru til kynna með nærveru vofunnar, verið umbreytt í andstæðu sína og hvatt einstaklinga til að upplifa endurkomu vofunnar sem uppbyggilega; tækifæri til að taka þátt í hreyfanlegum og gagnrýnum viðtökum á minni?

Síðasta spurningin lýsir ferli sem ég nefni *vofulegt sorgarferli* (e. spectral mourning) sem gefur til kynna hvernig nota mætti tímabil, eins og efnhagskreppuna í kjölfar hrunsins, til að leggja stund á gagnrýna og uppbyggilega umhugsun. Í vofulegu sorgarferli eltir vofan þann sem syrgir, ásækir hann og knýr hann til þess að horfast í augu við það sem illa fór í fortíðinni. Eftir atburð eins og fjármálahrunið árið 2008, hlýtur þannig tímabil gagnrýnnar endurskoðunar að vera nauðsynlegt; ekki aðeins til þess að leggja mat á hvað olli því að svo fór sem fór, heldur einnig til að endurhugsa þær menningarlegu fyrirmyndir, ímyndir og hugsjónir, sem hampað er í íslenskri menningu og samfélagi, og benda á þá knýjandi þörf að sýna auðmýkt, gagnrýni og margröddun þegar kemur að því að hugsa og skapa sameiginlegar sjálfsmyndir og þjóðlegar ímyndir. Að þessu leyti tengist vofulegt sorgarferli hugmyndinni um *minnisáðgerðir* (e. memory activism) sem ég fjalla um í kafla eitt, og byggir á því að rækta þær gegn-minningar (e. counter-memories) sem hvíla undir yfirborði hins sýnilega opinbera minnis, til að hafa áhrif á minningar framtíðar og hvernig fortíðin og samtíminn verði metin í

framtíðinni.²¹⁰ Greina má ákveðinn samhljóm milli þessara hugmynda og áherslunnar á framtíðina í vofufræði: hugmyndina um vofuna sem bæði „revenenant“ eða afturgöngu og „arrivant“ eða komumann, sem ber með sér skilaboð um það sem koma skal. Í umræðu um minni er hætt við að festast í afstöðu sem lítur aftur til fortíðar og meta sem svo að minni eigi aðeins við um liðna atburði. Minni hefur þvert á móti gríðarlega mikið vægi og gildi fyrir samtímann, t.d. fyrir sjálfsmyndarpólítík í samtímanum og þegar fjölbreytni menningarhópa er höfð að leiðarljósi í sköpun og skynjun á þjóðarsjálfsmynd. Ennfremur hefur það mikil áhrif á framtíðina hvernig við hugsum um og mótum sameiginlega sjálfsmynd, og eins þegar við hugsum um hverjir megi vera fulltrúar þess að *vera íslenskur*. Þess vegna býr minni yfir miklu félagslegu mikilvægi og gildi fyrir umræðu um sjálfsmynd og jafnrétti, innflytjendur og flóttafólk, og önnur brún málefni í alþjóðlegum samtíma.

²¹⁰ Gutman, *Memory Activism*, 2 and Rigney, „Remembering Hope“, 372.

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