

2. WHAT IS LIMINAL REMEMBRANCE?

I've always loved thresholds, the stepping over,
the shapechanging that can happen when
you jump off the edge into pure breath and then
the passage between inner and outer. (Meehan, "Six Sycamores" ll. 110-113)

The new Irish poets are poets of the in-between. Much like the speaker in Paula Meehan's "Six Sycamores" (2009), they love thresholds, especially when it comes to addressing the traditional topic of Irish national history. Thus, what poems such as Tom French's "Commute" (mentioned above), Paula Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs" or Anne Fitzgerald's "Storm Over Manhattan" have in common, is that they make remembering Ireland's past an exercise in ambiguity: they take a familiar poetic topic and paint it in the most ambivalent colours, as they experiment with "the passage between inner and outer", remembering and forgetting. As such, in the work of the new poets, the representation of history is indeed characterised by its "shapechanging" as historical phenomena constantly meander between being there and not being there, and between leaving a trace and disappearing into oblivion.

Before thoroughly analysing forms and functions of this liminal representation in the selected poems below, the present chapter will introduce current theories of memory, that help to conceptualise the phenomenon of liminal remembrance, and discuss some of the key concepts associated with this way of remembering the past.

2.1 *Liminal Remembrance: The Concept of Liminality*

To begin with, one cannot understand the phenomenon of liminal remembrance without the central notion of liminality. In recent years, this concept, which was first used by the anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner⁵ to describe a stage of transition in tribal rites of passage, has gained a prominent position in many academic disciplines and, as Bjørn Thomassen points out, "currently appears in myriad applications within practically all branches of the social and human sciences and is now also spreading to social media and popular culture" (39; also see Achilles/Bergmann 4).⁶ As such, liminality, much like 'identity' or 'narrative', has lately achieved the status of a traveling concept (cf. Thomassen 39; Bal) that is variably used with differ-

5 See van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* (first published 1909) and Turner's "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" (1964).

6 Achilles sees the reason for the recent boom of liminality in the fact that the concept strikes a universal chord in a globalised, postmodern world: he points out that "liminality as a concept of both demarcation and mediation between different processual stages, spatial complexes, inner states, and multiple identities is of obvious importance in an age of global mobility, digital networking, interethnicity, transnationality" (35). Similarly, Kay et al. define the use of liminality as a way of understanding the modern-day world, in which simple binaries successively need to be complemented with thinking about the 'in-between' (cf. 7).

ent connotations in different disciplinary contexts (cf. Achilles/Bergmann 3). This recent versatility of the term begs the question of how liminality is to be understood in the specific context of Irish poetry studies to describe the in-between status of history in the poetic works of Shaughnessy, Higgins, O'Sullivan and others.

To keep matters simple, following some general convictions in contemporary liminality research, liminality can be defined by three basic features: first, a phenomenon existing in a liminal condition, which can be a person, thing, place, event, or idea (cf. Achilles 35), is a phenomenon that exists in a *hybrid* state situated in between two different states of being. Entities in a liminal state thus move “beyond simple binaries” (Holm/Stene/Svensson 11), as they become an amalgam of both states involved.⁷ The liminal state then, as Bernhard Giesen points out, becomes a “third possibility” of existence (61), as seen in how historical events are treated in poems such as Leanne O'Sullivan's “Townland” (see Section 3.2), where they are neither simply remembered nor simply forgotten, but exist in a state in which they are *both* being remembered and being forgotten; this also becomes apparent in the figure of the homeless professor of history in Paul Durcan's “Politics” (see Section 3.5), who cannot be clearly categorised by the speaker into either the status of a homeless man, nor into the status of the renowned and respectable professor. Instead, he becomes a figure somewhere beyond the speaker's simple binary view of the world.

Second, as already visible in Durcan's example, in this hybrid in-between state, phenomena become highly *dynamic* entities that challenge the fixed categories and structures they might have had before entering a liminal state: as best described by the metaphor of the sea used in Vona Groarke's “To Smithereens”, once elements become liminal they enter a “state of flux” and movement (Nordin/Holmsten 7), in which they become “ultimately fluid and unfixable” (Kay et al. 8), as they are being constantly negotiated and re-arranged. A liminal existence, therefore, is defined by “the dislocation of established structures, [and] the reversal of established hierarchies” (Horvath/Thomassen/Wydra 2), as phenomena become structurally flexible and open towards change; the liminal, in the words of Paula Meehan's “Six Sycamores”, indeed becomes a state of “pure breath”, since phenomena are no longer restrained by any fixed rules. Thus, in Paula Cunningham's “The Hyacinth under the Stairs” (see Section 3.3), for example, the speaker recognises that events in her family's history cannot be fixed in memory, but seem to exist in a constant state of liminality in which they are highly flexible and constantly adapt new meaning and life once she attempts to reconstruct them in the present.

Third, phenomena in a liminal state are defined by *ambiguity and uncertainty*. As Arpad Slakolczai argues, existing in a liminal state resembles “a genuine Alice-in-Wonderland experience, a situation where almost anything can happen” (17): since

7 It is the interaction of two states in an in-between space that distinguishes liminality from the concept of marginality. While marginality refers to the relationship between centre and periphery *within one* state of being, liminality only exists in the convergence of *two* states as they transcend their boundaries towards each other.

the liminal avoids fixed structures and instead provides an ever-changing amalgam of different states (see above), phenomena in this condition always become the “un-classifiable remainder” since they exist in the ambivalent realm of “the ‘neither...nor’ or the ‘as well as...’” (Giesen 61). Liminal entities might take any in-between shape at any time and, as such, there is always an inherent “uncertainty [...] about future outcomes” involved (Horvath/Thomassen/Wydra 2). As Birte Heidemann claims, this state of uncertainty about how a certain entity might develop in the future can become a “*disabling condition*” (10; emphasis original), as the openness of the liminal state does not allow any clear directions to be followed. The dog in Lorna Shaughnessy’s “Dogged” (see Section 3.5), for example, which becomes a personification of the past itself, is neither inside nor outside the speaker’s house (symbolically it lies on the threshold) and the speaker does not know if it will stay or leave. In this context, the dog becomes a highly ambiguous figure the speaker cannot define any further, other than a presence in between familiarity and unfamiliarity, which makes the speaker stagnate in the present circumstances, with no clear path to follow.

These three basic features of liminality discussed in current liminality research provide a preliminary framework to more closely describe what is meant by a *liminal remembrance* of history in contemporary Irish poetry. However, to further capture what a liminal *remembrance* entails, one needs to take a closer look at the two key processes involved in recreating the past in recent Irish poetry: the processes of remembering and forgetting.

2.2 Liminal Remembrance: Remembering and Forgetting

In Kevin Higgins’ “Clear Out”, the speaker sets out to build a new life and a new identity for himself. For that purpose, he gets rid of all his old furniture, as he is led by the conviction that the creation of something new always requires the discarding of the old and unwanted. In the process of renovating his house and his self, he thus understands that the development of his present self is as much a matter of what he wants to keep and remember in his house as it is a matter of what he wants to forget. While the speaker utterly fails in his attempt of a personal re-invention (see Section 3.5), the interrelation between remembering and forgetting, upon which he builds this re-invention, is most relevant for understanding the liminal agenda in this poem, as well as many others. But what exactly do these processes of remembering and forgetting entail?

The liminal interaction between remembering and forgetting hinges on contemporary definitions of memory. Even though ‘memory’ is one of the most active travelling concepts and the vast field of memory studies is as complex as it is contested,⁸ recent

8 For an overview over different memory concepts and the development of memory studies see e.g. Astrid Erll’s *Memory in Culture* (2011) or Christian Gudehus, Ariane Eichenberg and Harald Welzer, eds., *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung: Ein interdisziplinäres*

definitions are based on the assumption that processes of memory cannot retrieve past experiences as they 'actually' happened. Rather, memory is understood to be a constructive act of sense making which involves the selection and interpretation of past phenomena and is influenced by personal, political and/or cultural factors in the present. The past, therefore, "is not an immutable or independent object. Rather it is endlessly revised from our present position" (Crang quoted in Collins/Caulfield 5); the same historical event can be represented in different manners, depending on who does the remembering in the present (cf. Olick/Robbins). As Barbara Misztal registers, "what we call the past is always already and irretrievably a profoundly altered version of the contents that were potentially available to consciousness when that past was present" (22). This ultimately leads to an "unavoidable gap between experiencing an event and remembering it" (Misztal 6). It is exactly this gap between actual experience and retrospective reconstruction that lies at the very heart of many liminal poems.

Recent contributions to memory studies more specifically define this active process of making sense of the past as an interaction between *two* equally important processes: remembering and forgetting. This perception of memory has dominated academic discourses to such an extent that scholars speak of a 'turn' in memory studies over the last two to three decades. Since the publication of studies such as Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* (1989) and *How Modernity Forgets* (2009), Harald Weinrich's *Lethé: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* (1997) or Gary Smith's and Hinderk M. Emrich's edited volume *Vom Nutzen des Vergessens* (1996) memory studies began to more dominantly regard the aspect of forgetting as an integral part in processes of memory. Thus, whereas, before the 'turn', forgetting was often negatively portrayed as a failure of memory that needs to be fought at any cost (cf. G. Smith 16),⁹

[r]ecently, the peculiar and elusive phenomenon of forgetting has been more prominently recognised, [...] especially in the social sciences, humanities and cultural studies [...]. Right now, not only does forgetting witness an increase in theoretical and analytical attention but also is the prioritisation of remembering before forgetting re-negotiated and at least partially relativised. Based on the hypothesis that forgetting is necessary, both for societies and individuals [...], more recent approaches challenge the common stigmatisation of forgetting as failure and moral misdemeanour. (Dimbath/Wehling 7, 11; trans. D.B.)¹⁰

Handbuch (2010). For the 'memory boom' in an Irish context see Emilie Pine's *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (2011).

9 For a full account of the (negative) history of forgetting see Weinrich (2000) and Behrens (2005).

10 German original: "Das eigenartige, nur schwer greifbare Phänomen des Vergessens ist neuerdings ins Rampenlicht gerückt und erregt große Aufmerksamkeit [...] gerade in den Sozial-, Kultur-, und Geisteswissenschaften [...]. Vergessen stößt gegenwärtig nicht alleine auf verstärkte theoretische und analytische Aufmerksamkeit, zugleich wird auch die normative 'Bevorzugung' des Erinnerns vor dem Vergessen zur Diskussion gestellt und wenigstens partiell relativiert. Mit der These, das Vergessen sei notwendig, sowohl für die Gesellschaft als auch für das Individuum [...] [wendet man sich] gegen

In contemporary memory studies remembering and forgetting are no longer perceived as strict antagonists, existing in an 'either/or' dichotomy, but as *complementary* parts in the act of re-constructing a meaningful past (cf. Musiol). In this context, current studies speak of "a dialectics of remembering and forgetting" (Climo/Cattell 1), thus perceiving them in a mutual interaction, in which forgetting is not just "a process of an involuntary and regrettable 'draining' or 'fading'", but a "productive process" (Keller 117-118)¹¹ in its own right. This process lies at the heart of Paula Cunningham's "The Hyacinth under the Stairs", for example, where the speaker explicitly leaves out, that is to say forgets, certain events of the past to actively shape a more positive picture of her family's history. Forgetting then becomes "the other [side of the] coin of memory" (Della Sala xiii), as the one cannot exist without the other.

At a closer look, this interdependence between remembering and forgetting generates dynamic interplay of inclusion and exclusion, as well as valuation and devaluation: a meaningful relationship with the past is created by remembering those past events and phenomena that are considered valuable in the present while forgetting other aspects that are presently useless or even harmful. In the interaction between remembering and forgetting then, "anything that is not included in the current perspective, the current spotlight of attention, will disappear in the darkness of oblivion" (Sebald 90; trans. D.B.).¹² This process is lyrically enacted by many 'waste poems' discussed in Section 3.5, where things that are meant to be forgotten appear in the shape of waste thrown away by the speaker, as, for instance, can be seen in the form of the clutter discarded from the speaker's house in Iggy McGovern's "The Skip" (see Section 3.5). Ultimately, memory functions like a stencil that is put onto the past: the interaction between remembering and forgetting becomes a dynamic negotiation of value and non-value that 'carves out' and contours a certain image of the past by drawing the line between the "'memorable' and 'forgettable'" (Misztal 11; cf. Jörissen/Marotzki 95). This demarcation of value and non-value provides a clear focus for present actions (cf. Endreß 62) thus making memory a necessary cultural practice (cf. Lachmann): since one cannot recall everything that happened in the past, the reconstructive process of memory is the cultural means to actively shaping a meaningful path from the past to the present, much like the road the speaker looks back upon in John McAuliffe's "Hedge", where some things can be clearly seen while others, in-

die geläufige Stigmatisierung des Vergessens als Versagen oder moralische Verfehlung".

- 11 German original: "Vergessen und Erinnern [...] stehen danach in keinem Gegensatzverhältnis, sondern werden zu komplementären, in einem dialektischen Verhältnis zueinanderstehende Modi des Präsenten [...]. [Vergessen ist kein] Prozess des unbeabsichtigten, bedauernden 'Absickerns' und 'Ausblendens', des mehr oder weniger bewussten 'Löschens' von Erfahrungen [...]. Vergessen im weiten soziologischen Verständnis ist vielmehr ein produktiver Prozess".
- 12 German original: "[w]as nicht in der Perspektive des aktuellen Problems, des aktuellen Blickstrahls der Aufmerksamkeit liegt [...] verschwindet in die Dunkelheit des Vergessens".

cluding a national monument, are left to be forgotten on the roadside “beyond plantations of fir and rowan” (l. 16).

According to the studies discussed so far, in memory an individual event or phenomenon can exist in two states: it is either remembered or forgotten, meaning it is either included in the spotlight of memory, or excluded from it and left in the dark. Events of the past then gain their meaning and value in a dialectic relationship with other events, which are also either included or excluded from memory. Yet, the question arises if the attribution of value and meaning is necessarily based on a binary ‘either/or’ decision between “the things worth keeping and forgetting” (Keller 117; trans. D.B.).¹³ This question is especially relevant in the context of this study, since such a binary understanding of memory can hardly describe what happens in poems such as John McAuliffe’s “A Pyramid Scheme” (see Section 3.5), where elements of the past, materialised in the form of an old car wreck, are displayed as being located somewhere in between the binary divide: the past is both part of the speaker’s suburban community and not part of it at the same time, thus meandering between remembrance and oblivion. In McAuliffe’s poem then, as in many other Irish poems, there is a “third possibility” of existence in memory, which is established in between the processes of remembering and forgetting. In the following paragraphs, this liminal position will be conceptualised in more detail.

Judging from what has been said about liminality, remembering and forgetting so far, what would a liminal state between these two processes imply? Using the three basic features of liminality discussed in Section 2.1, one might describe this state as follows. First, considering remembering and forgetting as a dynamic interaction of including and excluding items or events from recollection, a liminal entity is neither included in nor excluded from memory and yet comprises aspects of both inclusion and exclusion in its in-between position. Second, as such, a liminal memory item exists in a ‘state of flux’ and constant negotiation where it is not shaped along clear lines of valuation and devaluation but, third, creates a “third possibility” of existence in the realm of memory: it exists in a mode of vagueness and indecision that transforms any element that enters a liminal state into an amalgam of being remembered and being forgotten simultaneously. The last aspect can for example be seen in Paul Perry’s “Tonight, the Sea”, where the historical event of the Spanish Armada being defeated is both part and not part of the speaker’s memory, as symbolised in the appearance of “a barrage of ghosts” (l. 7) that can both be seen (“envisioning the fear the mariners felt”; l. 17) and not be seen (“Is there anything to salvage from the sea?”; l. 20).

This liminal state of a memory item between being remembered and being forgotten can be more carefully theorised with the help of Dimbath’s and Wehling’s more dynamic definition of forgetting: next to the complete loss of an element (“Verlust”), they also include the possibility of a memory item’s fading from memory (“Verblissen”;

13 German original: “dem Be-wahrens-werten und dem Vergessen”.

17). This definition allows a more dynamic conceptualisation of the term than theories that merely perceive forgetting as one side of a binary opposition. According to Dimbath and Wehling, forgetting does not only entail the actual exclusion of an item from memory, but also its *gradual movement* towards complete exclusion. As such, they introduce a dynamic scale which can register various different stages in between remembering and forgetting or between being fully included and being fully excluded in memory.

Harald Weinrich advocates a similarly dynamic understanding that is already entailed in the etymology of the word ‘to forget’: he points out that ‘to forget’ is best paraphrased as ‘to get away from something’ or ‘to distance oneself from something’ (cf. 11). The spatial implication of a distance can also be applied to the process of forgetting according to Dimbath and Wehling: forgetting is not merely the total exclusion but also the process of distancing an item from memory to variable degrees that does not necessarily end in absolute oblivion. Rather, one may think of the ‘in-betweenness’ of liminal memories as a complex space of ‘partial forgetting/remembering’ (cf. Dimbath/Wehling 17). Remembering needs to be defined accordingly: it is also conceptualised as a gradual movement yet directed towards the opposite end, the centre of memory. The liminal space circumscribed by the extreme poles of being remembered/included and being forgotten/excluded therefore is a space in which the two gradual movements of remembering and forgetting dynamically overlap and balance each other out. It is the space of various shades of ‘fading’ framed by two forces that equally ‘pull’ an item into opposite directions, ultimately leaving it in an in-between position. This fundamental liminality of all memory items becomes obvious, for example, when Günter Butzer and Manuela Günter claim that every remembered item already latently entails the potential to be forgotten and vice versa (cf. 9). The liminal interaction that characterises the memory process can thus be depicted as follows:

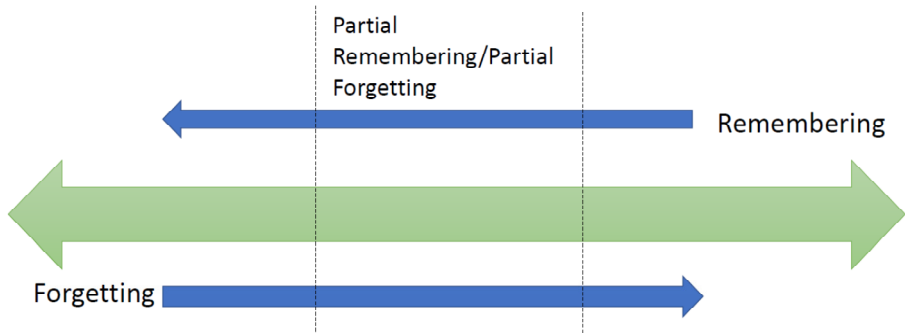


Fig. 1: Liminal Interaction in Processes of Remembering and Forgetting

2.3 Liminal Remembrance, the Album and the Lexicon

As already argued in the introduction, the liminal representation of national history in contemporary Irish poetry is closely linked to and influenced by the personal perspective many poems use to reconstruct the past. Be it in the form of a speaker reflecting on her aunts while looking at a private photograph in Joan McBreen's "The Photograph of My Aunts" (see Section 3.4) or of a speaker reminiscing about an evening spent with friends in Iggy McGovern's "The News in 1974" (see Section 3.2), national history is usually remembered through the lens of an individual's personal memories rather than the perspective of cultural memory. Seen through the personal lens, national events are often reconstructed on the basis of a speaker's individual experiences and concrete sensory impressions he/she witnessed in the past, as becomes apparent in John F. Deane's "The Wild Meadow" (2003), where a speaker remembers Ireland's struggle for independence by contemplating over the grandfather's old "RIC uniform/ wrapped in its residue of bitterness" (ll. 34-35) or in Paula Cunningham's "Geography and Sweetshops" (2013), where a child-speaker remembers the Troubles through the experience of seeing broken pieces of glass in front of her aunt's sweetshop. Typically, these personal experiences and micro-insights into broader historical contexts are then supplemented by what a speaker has retrospectively learned about these events, thus turning the remembrance of national history through a decidedly personal perspective into an interaction between individual experiences and acquired public knowledge.

The question of how private individuals remember national history has been given little theoretical attention so far (cf. Gudehus/Eichenberg/Welzer, eds.).¹⁴ Indeed, there are hardly any concepts that might help to describe this facet of liminal remembrance. However, one study proves to be very useful in this regard: Harald Welzer's, Sabine Moller's and Karoline Tschuggnall's *'Opa war kein Nazi': Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (2012) provides concrete theoretical explorations of personal memories about national history, as it perceives personal memory as an interaction between sensory experiences (the album) and semantic knowledge (the lexicon).

Aiming at an analysis of how private individuals and their families remember German history during the *Third Reich* period, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall start their study with a more general examination of how private individuals can reconstruct national

14 In contemporary memory studies, analyses of how national history is remembered are often limited to examining the public cultural perspective only. In this context, as Hirst and Manier argue, most studies focus on the ideological function that 'official' versions of national history fulfil for particular political elites. The private individual, on the other hand, is often left out of the analytical frame: "the emphasis in the sociological literature on power and state hegemony seems to ignore in its discussions more intimate collective memories such as those between friends or among family members" (40).

history in the first place. For the authors, the main question to be answered in this context is,

how human beings compose representations and images of the past using different pieces of information from such diverging sources as history books, feature films and their own experience [...]. (9; trans. D.B.).¹⁵

In their opinion, personal reconstructions of the national past¹⁶ are complex memory activities: each personal recollection is a multi-faceted composition (“komponieren”) made of different pieces of information (“Versatzstücken”/“disparaten Quellen”) that interact in a certain way to construct concrete images (“Bilder”) or interpretations of the past. These various pieces of information, as Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall specify, stem from two main memory sources: personal perspectives on national history draw their information from personal experience and emotion (“emotionaler Vorstellung”) on the one hand and cognitive historical knowledge (“kognitivem Geschichtswissen”) on the other hand (10). Welzer and his colleagues use the metaphors of the album and the lexicon to label these two interacting sources (cf. Welzer/Moller/Tschuggnall 10).

The album and the lexicon must each be interpreted as complex structures. Although they are mutually dependent, generally they differ from each other in three respects:

	Album	Lexicon
<i>Cognitive Basis</i>	episodic memory (experience)	semantic memory (knowledge)
<i>Memory Perspective</i>	communicative: biographical interpretation in the everyday horizon	cultural: normative interpretation in the cultural horizon
<i>Addressee</i>	concrete, private individuals; families; peer groups	abstract, public collectives; e.g. nations

Fig. 2: Differences between Album and Lexicon

First and foremost, album and lexicon differ regarding the *kind* of cognitive information they rely upon. Like many approaches in the field of cognitive memory studies, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall follow the general argument that “human memory operates within different systems for cognitive and emotional memories” (10; trans. D.B.);¹⁷ or, in the terminology of the field: human memory is constituted of the *episodic* and the *semantic* memory system (cf. Tulving). Endel Tulving classically de-

15 German original: “wie Menschen Vorstellungen und Bilder über die Vergangenheit aus den unterschiedlichsten Versatzstücken aus so disparaten Quellen wie Geschichtsbüchern, Spielfilmen und eigener Erfahrung komponieren [...]”.

16 Throughout their study, they mostly use the terms *Vergangenheit* and *Geschichte* as synonyms for describing (German) national history.

17 German original: “das menschliche Gedächtnis mit unterschiedlichen Systemen für kognitive und emotionale Erinnerungen operiert”.

finer episodic memory as a dynamic cognitive container “concerned with unique, concrete, personal experiences dated in the rememberer’s past” (v), such as the sound of bombs stored in the speaker’s memory in Paul Perry’s “Of the gas stove and the glimmerman” (see Section 3.3). Episodic memory can be defined as the collection of any “personally experienced events, places, or things” in the past (Hirst/Manier 42), which have been mentally stored as ‘memorable’. In the context of the present study, ‘experience’ shall exclusively be defined as the emotional and sensory (i.e. visual, acoustic, olfactory etc.) perception of an event in “a specific time in a specific location” in the past (Haselmo ix). This sensory impression might have been made by an individual directly acting in the event (see the WWI poems by Tom French depicting the perspective of actual soldiers) or by an individual merely witnessing the event as a passive observer (see the speaker’s contact with media reports seen on “the new big/ Colour TV in the corner” [ll. 12-13] in Macdara Woods’ “Coffee at the Café Rimbaud” (2006); cf. Kormi-Nouri/Nilsson 97).

Semantic memory, on the other hand, consists of elements that have been intellectually acquired rather than sensually and emotionally experienced. The semantic memory system is more abstract as it contains “factual information without any feeling of where or when this information was gained” (Schrijnemakers 1). Hence, it is about “abstract, timeless knowledge of the world that he [the individual] shares with others” (Tulving v). This knowledge is stored in different categories (cf. Izquierdo 7), including the category of knowledge about national history. This knowledge consists of general, mostly public interpretations of historical events that an individual learns¹⁸ in history lessons in school/university (as in Iggy McGovern’s “The Cartographers” [2010] in which pupils get to know about the Troubles via a “giant map of our town” [l. 1]), by watching TV or listening to radio programs (as in Vona Groarke’s “To Smithereens”; see below), or by attending commemorative festivities (as in Martina Evans’ “The 50th Anniversary of the Easter Rising” [2009] in which the speaker talks about her experiences of “the old IRA closing one eye to fire shots over the monument” every year [l. 15]). These pieces of information are not emotionally tied to the individual (as they are not founded upon his/her own experience), but rather stored according to their inherent logic and their semantic coherence. The knowledge found in the semantic memory, therefore, is independent from the event itself. The temporal gap between the event and learning about the event can vary greatly, from listening to a news report only minutes after the event to reading about an event that took place centuries ago in a history book; this temporal range will play a major role in analysing the poems of the ‘indirect memory’ type (see Section 3.2).

18 In this context, ‘learning’ is exclusively understood as an intellectual process in which an individual adds or modifies units of abstract, semantic information (provided by others, ranging from other private individuals to public institutions) to the already existing cognitive network. Regarding the matter of national history, the process of learning is thus distinct from experiencing as it lacks the physical/sensory relationship to the learned matter (i.e. historical event).

Next to these differences in their cognitive foundation, album and lexicon differ regarding the memory perspective. Influenced by a common distinction in the field of cultural memory studies, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall associate the album with the *communicative memory* mode and the lexicon with the *cultural memory* mode (cf. J. Assmann: “kulturelles Gedächtnis”). Communicative and cultural memory describe the two main perspectives through which societies usually recall the past (cf. Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 126). They differ from each other in their temporal range as well as in their memory practice and way of looking at the past.

Communicative memory can be seen as a society’s “short-term memory” (Welzer/Moller/Tschuggnall 12; trans. D.B.),¹⁹ in the sense that this perspective is built on concrete experiences made by concrete individuals. Thus, its range is naturally limited by an individual’s life span: “it is bound to the existence of the living carriers and communicators of experience and covers a time span of roughly 80 years” (Welzer/Moller/Tschuggnall 12; trans. D.B.),²⁰ this might be one of the reasons why in Irish poetry the Irish struggle for Independence of a grandparent generation is often the most distant historical context that is remembered. In contrast, cultural memory, according to Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, cannot only depict the lived past of contemporaries but also illuminate the distant past outside an individual’s memory reach. Rather, cultural memory is an “institutionally shaped and sustained memory” (Misztal 12), which is independent from an individual’s experiences.

Furthermore, communicative memory is established in everyday (mostly oral) communication, in which individuals share their own past experiences with others in their everyday environment. Astrid Erll labels this immediate environment the “alltagsweltliche Nahhorizont” (*Kollektives Gedächtnis* 130; hereafter: ‘everyday horizon’). Cultural memory, on the other hand, is a thoroughly structured and institutionalised mode of accessing the past addressing more abstract collectives, such as ‘the nation’. With this addressee in mind, it is established mostly in institutions such as “schools, courts, museums and the mass media” (Misztal 20), as exemplified in Lorna Shaughnessy’s “Standing Ovation in ‘The Crum’” (2015), where the speaker visits the “Crumlin Road Gaol” (l.3), which has been turned into a museum. As such, with its “timeline[s]” (l. 7) and its “[h]eritage kitsch” (l. 19), this former prison has become part of a renewed cultural memory practice. Cultural memory then can be labelled as the “officially sanctioned memory” (McBride 40) that builds upon the “kulturelle[] Fernhorizont” (Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 130; hereafter: ‘cultural horizon’).

In the end, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall’s terms of the album and the lexicon are complex concepts, in so far as they each combine different cognitive (i.e. type of information; experience vs. knowledge), cultural (i.e. mode; communicative vs. cultural)

19 German original: “Kurzzeitgedächtnis”.

20 German original: “[e]s ist an die Existenz der lebendigen Träger und Kommunikatoren von Erfahrung gebunden und umfasst etwa 80 Jahre”.

and social (i.e. different addressees) dimensions with each other. These concepts become an ideal foundation for analysing the various facets of personal memory in contemporary Irish poetry, especially since they provide a differentiated perspective of how national history is negotiated by an individual.

The album and the lexicon constantly interact, which makes national history a matter of internalised knowledge *as well as* personal experiences (cf. von Petersdorff 136). More to the point, the interaction between album and lexicon can be described as a relationship of mutual dependence, in which the one serves as an interpretative frame for the other. Thus, on the one hand, the album serves as a frame of reference through which information from the lexicon is filtered and, if necessary, altered and assimilated. The album thus provides “the frame [...] for how learned historical knowledge is interpreted and used” (Welzer/Moller/Tschuggnall 13; trans. D.B.).²¹ This sort of framing will most obviously become apparent in poems of the ‘family memory’ type (see Section 3.3).

On the other hand, the lexicon also serves as an interpretative frame for an individual’s album. As an example, Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall mention the wide-spread public narrative in Germany about the *Third Reich* as a “universe of horror”, which serves as a matrix according to which individuals interpret their own experiences at the time; namely, in a way “that this horror does not cast a shadow on them” (13; trans. D.B.).²² As such, next to embedding official ‘facts’ into the framework of the album, one also needs to consider the “deep influence and long-lasting effect of history on individual biography” (A. Assmann, *Geschichte* 32; trans. D.B.);²³ the reconstruction of one’s encounter with national events in the past is equally going through a parallel process of justifying where and how these experiences can be positioned within the public version, as can be seen in Harry Clifton’s “Grandfather”, where the speaker questions the role his grandfather played in the public interpretation of World War II.

In the end, the personal reconstruction of national history is a process of double framing between the album and the lexicon. Personal remembrance of national history is defined by the simultaneity of two acts of ‘justification’ unfolding at the same time. While the album is emotionally and biographically relevant for the individual as a private being, the lexicon gains a normative relevance for the individual as a public agent in society (cf. Misztal 40). In personal recollections of national history, therefore, the rememberer needs to mitigate between two roles (i.e. public and private) and, with them, two value systems stemming from two modes of accessing the past. This complex interaction between album and lexicon lies at the very core of the limi-

21 German original: “den Rahmen dafür [...] wie das gelernte Geschichtswissen gedeutet und gebraucht wird”.

22 German original: “Universum des Grauens [...] dass von diesem Grauen kein Schatten auf sie fällt”.

23 German original: “tiefe Prägung und nachhaltige Einwirkung von Geschichte auf individuelle Biographie”.

nal representation of national history in so many contemporary Irish poems, as the album and the lexicon pair up with processes of remembering and forgetting in various ways to construct indeterminate memory spaces and “passage[s] between inner and outer”, as the speaker in Meehan’s poem, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, indicates.