

chapter one

# **i n t r o d u c t i o n**

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

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Landscape architecture, as introduced by John Dixon Hunt in his article ‘First Principles or Rudiments’, “*is a fundamental mode of human expression and experience*” (Hunt, 2000, p. 8). Through exploring various aspects of ‘landscape’, specifically looking at the case of post genocide memoryscapes, this study aims to begin a discussion on how contemporary memorials to human inflicted tragedy are designed, experienced and interpreted within the global world of today.

It has long been accepted that ‘landscape’ is a reflection of society and culture, the physical manifestation of man and his environment. Underlying this however, is the belief that landscape architecture can critically engage the ‘self’ – to not simply be a “*reflection of culture but more an active instrument in the shaping of modern culture*” (Corner, 1999, p. 1). Through an examination of the physical, emotional, experiential and interpretative qualities of site, this research investigates the potential of design to engage the mind and heart. Landscape is therefore both ideological and emotional, as Corner states “*Landscape reshapes the world not only because of its physical and experiential characteristics but also because of its eidetic content, its capacity to contain and express ideas*” (Corner, 1999, p. 1).

In conducting field research in Cambodia, Rwanda and Germany during 2007 and 2008, the practice and evolution of post-genocide memorialisation, and the experience and interpretation there-of, was considered in relation to three very different societies attempting to manage their genocidalry pasts - their landscapes of tragedy. By looking at memorialisation of the Rwandan genocide over the past 15 years, and its complex and multifaceted context in relation to what has occurred in Cambodia during three decades of post-genocide development, and in Germany longer than that, several important aspects of memorialisation and interpretation emerge that offer new insight into understanding the representation and expression of post-genocide memory, memorial design, and the role design plays in shaping Euro-western experience and interpretation of international genocide sites. Although very different culturally, politically and historically, the genocides that occurred in Rwanda, Cambodia and Germany, and the memorials that arose in their wake, beg for more critical analysis, interpretation and comparison (Cook, 2006. p. vi).

## 1.2 RESEARCH AIMS & CORE ASSUMPTION

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The core assumption adopted within this study, from which my research is positioned, was introduced by Sarah Steele in her 2006 referred paper titled '*Memorialisation and the Land of the Eternal Spring: Performative practices of memory on the Rwandan genocide*', who suggests that genocide memorialisation has moved beyond being a primary ritual practised by the victim/survivor community, to today becoming a compulsively practiced ritual for the international community, reflecting the contemporary view that genocide is a grave crime against humanity as a whole (Steele, 2006). Recognising this idea to be particularly relevant within the context of modern developments in mass media, advanced communications and the extensive opportunity for travel, growing tourist interest in the nations of Cambodia and Rwanda is considered here in terms of the experience and interpretation of genocide memorials, where, as Paul Williams suggests, international visitors may have little previous or personal connection with the specific events and victims represented (Williams, 2004a, p. 208).

Today, infused with tensions of post genocide society, memoryscapes to genocide have both a symbolic role in providing a setting in which to honour and remember the victims, but are also seen today to support the idea that genocide memorialisation has moved beyond the victim community to having an elevated significance within the international context. While it might readily be assumed that the embedding of memory in post-genocide landscapes would represent the needs of victims and survivors – that it would be their right to remember in a way that is meaningful to them – the many competing pressures in post genocide societies see memory and representation become contested concerns, a collection of forensic exhibits, a place for international education, or even a commodity by way of tourism.

Concerned particularly with the practice of memorial design, the process of interpretation, and the shaping of Euro-Western 'engagement' with site and context, this study aims to investigate the key research questions of:

- Why we *design* memorial sites the way we do?
- How do Euro-Western visitors *experience* memorial sites to genocide in countries very different to our own?
- How do Euro-Western visitors *interpret* genocide memorials within nations which are very different to our own?
- How do Euro-Western visitors *connect* with memorials to tragedy, with which they may have little personal connection?

Chapters two to five sets out the contextual and methodological background for Chapters six, seven and eight which investigate these core research questions through a three step phenomenological critique of 'encountered', 'existential' and 'hermeneutic' enquiry.

## 1.3 INTRODUCTION TO KEY RESEARCH THEMES

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Using the case study sites of Cambodia and Rwanda, engagement with site will be analysed in relation to Euro-Western interpretation of the national memorial sites, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and the Kigali Memorial Centre in Kigali, Rwanda. Woven through this study, the key research themes of ‘Global Memory and Tourism’, the ‘Internationalisation of Memorial Design’, and the ‘Transposition of Interpretation through time and culture’ will be investigated in relation to Euro-Western experience and interpretation of the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda. Drawing upon both ‘on-site’ and ‘follow-up’ field research, and the vast discourse and analysis written in relation to the memory, design and interpretation of memorialisation in the West, specifically in relation to the established landscape of the Jewish Holocaust, this study will look to investigate how Euro-Western visitors ‘connect’ with the national genocide memorials in Cambodia and Rwanda.

A fact of contemporary life, globalisation and the consequential internationalisation of landscape and design is today an unavoidable reality. Significantly effecting the form and function of design, Adam states “*The challenges of globalisation are relentlessly shaping architecture’s relationship with society and culture*” (Adam, 2008, p. 74). This study, focusing on the three key research themes is a study that crosses many conventional disciplinary boundaries and tests the limits of traditional design research. Situated within the context of genocide memorialisation, this research looks at the broad issues of why we memorialise, how we memorialise, and how we then experience and interpret those memorials. Investigated in relation to the growing tourist industries in Cambodia and Rwanda, Euro-Western interpretation of these post genocide memoryscapes will be investigated, and will specifically look at the extent to which global memory and the internationalisation of memorial design engage international visitors, shaping an affective cognition of meaning. This research will also investigate the extent to which memorial design can transpose interpretation, moving and evolving, connecting with people through time, culture, religion, and political backgrounds.

## 1.4 METHOD OF ENQUIRY

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A design critique-based thesis, this study develops a three-step phenomenological enquiry to investigate the design, experience and site interpretation of Euro-Western visitors to the three case study sites in Cambodia and Rwanda. Utilising Juan Pablo Bonta's (1979) three steps for gathering information about people's interpretation of architecture, a framework for the methodology is developed and will be discussed in detail in Chapter five. Introduced briefly here however, Bonta believes that as human beings, we have a certain natural or acquired sensitivity to architecture, art and design that can be called upon, particularly in the role of 'designer' as 'researcher'. Undertaken in isolation from the input of others however, the shortcomings of this method are obvious insofar as we would be forced to act in a double capacity – as the source, and as the processor of the data collected. With the obvious disadvantage of this method undertaken in isolation from others, the second source suggested by Bonta consists of field studies. The advantage of this method in conjunction with that of the first, is that there are additional sources of information, external to the researcher and thus relatively independent. The final source for gathering information about people's interpretation of architecture, space, and design, consists of a deep reading of established literature. The method of enquiry will therefore be threefold, and will develop a phenomenologically based study focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the design and Euro-Western interpretation of the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda.

Memorials by their very nature as social constructs are infused with the tensions of man by way of political, economic, social, cultural and religious agendas. Through a series of exercises that gather information on the design and interpretation of the genocide memorial sites, I explore, how these spaces 'connect' with man, deterred or not by the traditional boundaries of time and culture.

## **1.5 LIMITATIONS OR JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY**

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As a New Zealand citizen brought up with the luxury of security, stability and peace, distanced geographically from the raw threat of war, it is not possible to understand fully, from a Rwandan or Cambodian perspective, many of the issues discussed in this research. In addition, the limited time I was able to spend on site, language and political difficulties, and 'human ethics' complexities, meant I was not able to interview locals for my research. For this reason, the decision was made at the outset, to investigate the design, experience and interpretation of genocide memorial sites in Cambodia and Rwanda from the Euro-Western perspective, from the outside 'tourist' perspective. Rather than a limitation or restriction as such, this perspective was embraced as a new step forward in the contemporary discussion surrounding memorialisation and its interpretation. In a world that grows smaller with every day, international interpretation is a real and significant issue for nations such as Cambodia and Rwanda, as more and more industry is developed around the tourism sector, and more pressures are placed on the memoryscapes of countries surviving in the aftermath of genocide.

## 1.6 THESIS FRAMEWORK

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This thesis builds on the discussions outlined above by way of key research themes presented in chapters two and three. Chapter two investigates globalisation and tourism in relation to memorialisation, specifically looking at issues of global memories, and the international terrain of memory. Chapter three investigates the process of memorialisation and introduces the issue of interpretation, exploring specifically the broad issues of memory and memorial design, design interpretation and the transposition of interpretation through time and culture. Further discussion on design interpretation will be detailed in Chapter five as part of the methodology,

Chapter four introduces the case study sites in Cambodia and Rwanda. Reviewing both context and site, Chapter four records the history and contemporary memory of the genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda. Introducing the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre in Cambodia, and the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda, this chapter introduces the relationships between history, memory, and memorialisation within the landscape.

Chapter five demonstrates the methodology, introducing key aspects of the research method including case study method, design critique (including Bonta's *Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation*, 1974), and phenomenology. Outlining the three-step phenomenological method, this chapter details the 'encountered', 'existential' and 'hermeneutic' modes of enquiry, outlining both the theoretical base and practical application of each mode.

Chapter six investigates the subject of 'memory layers', and the *design* of site, introducing the politicisation of memory and memorial design. Using the case study investigation of Berlin, the first section of this chapter looks at the layers of representation in relation to Germany's memoryscape during the post-war period. Specifically investigating the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and Peter Eisenman's 2005 Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, this chapter considers memorial development within Germany over the past 60 years, and the political, social and cultural issues that have arisen. Continuing on to explore the situation in Cambodia and Rwanda, aspects of the political, social, cultural and economic agendas influencing the memoryscapes of these two nations is discussed. Finally this chapter looks at, by way of encountered phenomenological enquiry, the internationalisation, or Westernisation of genocide memorialisation in Cambodia and Rwanda.

Chapter seven investigates Euro-Western *experience* of space, site and self, in relation to the case study sites, considering the key research theme of global memory, explored by way of existential phenomenological enquiry.

Chapter eight explores the *interpretation* of site, and particularly looks at the key research theme of the transposition of interpretation, or in other words, the movement of meaning. Comparing each case study site from Cambodia and Rwanda, dominated by textures of preservation, documentation and education, with Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Chapter eight explores the ability of design to connect with people through time and culture.

Finally, Chapter nine seeks to discuss the key findings and discussions introduced and investigated throughout this research. Extending the discussion introduced by Steele (2006) around international participation in the rites and rituals of genocide commemoration, this research asserts that genocide memorialisation can no longer be seen only as a right of the victim/survivor community (although this is a vital and immensely important aspect), but today – primarily through the influencing aspects of globalisation - has become also a right for the international community, as genocide is today understood as a human problem, unbounded by time, geographic location, ethnicity, or religion, and that through the processes of mass media, the proliferation of popular knowledge and today's ease of travel, we can all assume responsibility, at some level, for the tragedy of genocide.

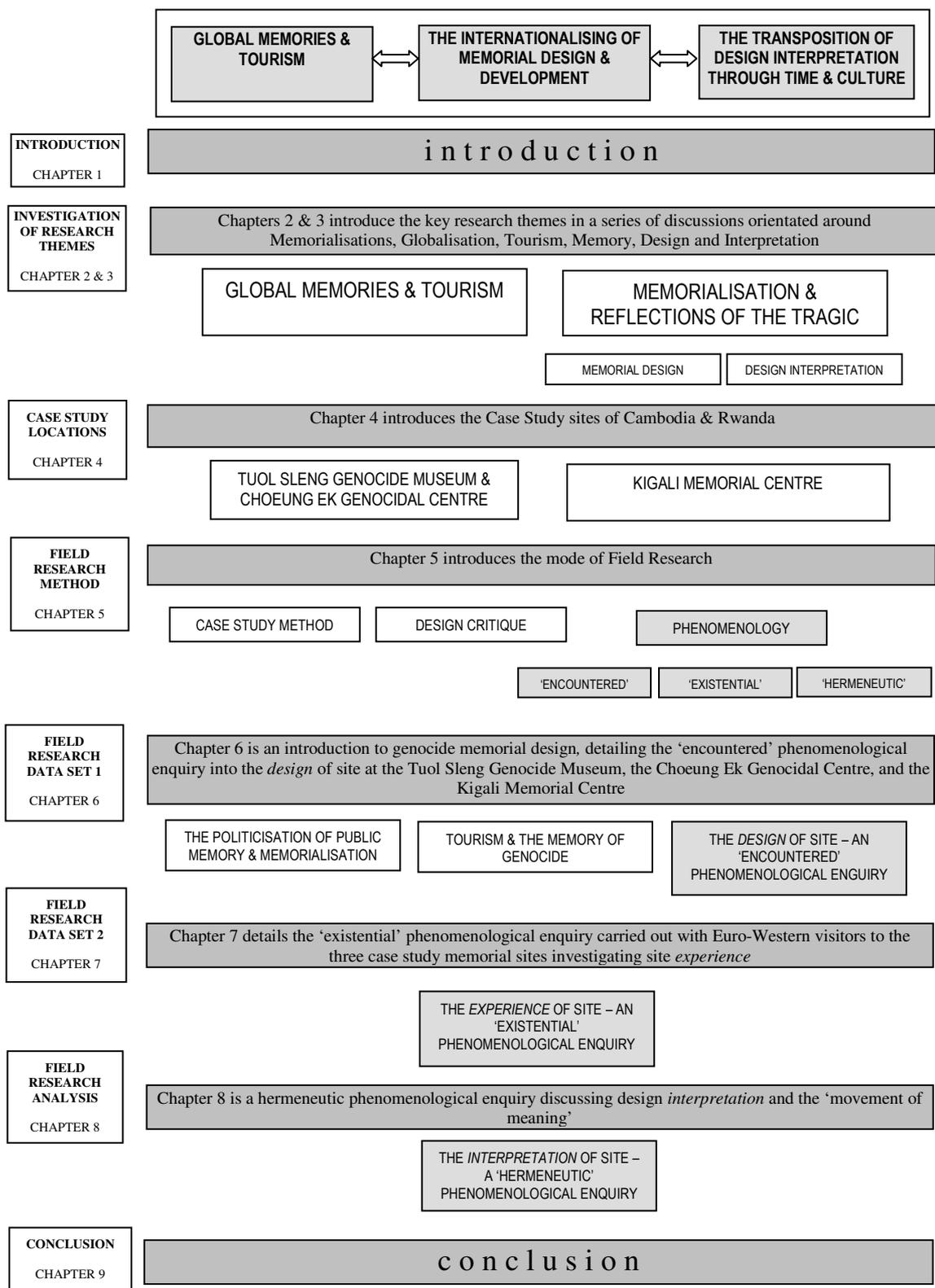


Fig. 1.1

Thesis Framework Diagram

## 1.7 SETTING

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The terror of genocide is something we should never know. The planned and deliberate extermination of one group of human beings by another seems inconceivable in our modern 'civilised' world. To understand the madness of genocide, governments, institutions and scholars throughout the world have devoted much time and effort to the research and analysis of genocide, making particular reference to aspects of social, political and economic circumstance observed around the process of genocide. In terms of genocide memorialisation, attention surrounding the design and discourse of history in relation to the Jewish Holocaust has also been widespread throughout much of the Western world. In relation to Cambodia and Rwanda however, the phenomenon of genocide memorialisation has received little comment (Williams, 2004b, p.235).

Research and analysis of the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides today focuses primarily around issues of cause and effect. Most scholars of the Khmer Rouge reign for example have focused on the major questions relating to how Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge took power, what the ideas and motives were that led to the ultra-Maoist regime, and who the victims were. Similarly, those studying the Rwandan genocide have examined why political elites in one of the world's poorest countries sought to exterminate the minority Tutsi, how they succeeded in wiping out 75% of these people in the space of 100 days, and what the prospects are for reconciliation in the tiny east African nation (Cook, 2006, p. v.). From the gas chambers of the Nazi Holocaust to the Killing Fields of Cambodia, to the mass graves of the Rwandan genocide, Susan Cook from the Yale Institute of Genocide Studies suggests that it is often those spatial details of state-sponsored mass murder that become emblematic of the evil itself, and able to best express the madness of genocide (Cook, 2006, p. 296). The living space of a physical location, a place within our landscape where genocide has taken place, or where genocide is memorialised are haunting reminders of our capability as human beings to perform unthinkable atrocity. It is for this reason that memorials attain such significant status in the aftermath of genocide. They reveal themselves as places where truths are laid out in terms of chosen narratives, where it is revealed what happened through documentation, and through this we are confronted with the very stuff of memory – in all its contradictions and complexity, but with the insistent need to remember. While, in the past, much analysis has sought to understand the scope and character of the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, any comparative analysis of the form and function of their memorialisation has been notably absent (Williams, 2004b, p. 235).

The research undertaken within this study will not challenge the established literature written in the aftermath of these tragedies, as much as build on it, by using new research methods, theoretical approaches and critical analysis to advance investigation into aspects of memorialisation and design interpretation, and in particular, the way design responds to, reflects, and shapes, the complex relationship between man and meaning. This study goes beyond the 'conventional' genocide research topics outlined above, looking in-depth at the

contemporary issues of globalisation and tourism, memorial design and development, and the important sub-act of visitor interpretation.

In developing the context for this study, many memorial sites were researched and visited. From the traditional and static stone World War I and II memorials in New Zealand pronouncing a narrative of sacrifice, justice and peace, to the *New Zealand Memorial* in London commemorating our shared heritage and sacrifice during times of war as well as our unique identity as Aotearoa. From the politically controversial *War Crimes Museum* in Ho Chi Minh City, explicitly detailing the crimes of the USA during the Vietnam War, to the quiet *Jewish Museum* in Venice. From the *Church of Bones* in the Czech Republic town of Sedlec, where thousands of skeletons adorn and decorate the inside of the Ossuary, to Eisenman's field of concrete stelae which is the *2005 Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* situated in central Berlin. From the experiential qualities of Libeskind's *Garden of Exile and Emigration* at the Jewish Museum in Germany, to the stark documentation of Nazi crimes documented at the *Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum* in Oranienburg. From the *UK Holocaust Centre* founded by the Aegis Trust in Nottinghamshire, to Andy Goldsworthy's *Garden of Stones* at the Jewish Museum in New York City. From 'Ground Zero' and the 2007 September 11 commemorations in New York City, to the humble plaque set into the grass in Embankment Park to the victims of the *London Underground Bombings*. From the *Ann Frank House* and memorials to homosexuals and gypsies in Amsterdam, to the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda, extensively visited and analysed within this project. This research has indeed taken me around the world seeing the very worst of humanity – to see the tragedy of man.