

chapter eight

**connecting with  
tragedy through  
landscapes of  
memory**

euro-western *interpretation*  
of site

## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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Landscapes today throughout the world are undeniably marked by the atrocities of 20<sup>th</sup> century genocide, a stark statement of the human condition, emphasising the point that genocide is a human problem, unbounded by physical, cultural or political boundaries. These sites persist as markers of memory, painful reminders of the human capability to kill, but perhaps also hopeful warnings for future generations, both local and global. Set within the cultural landscape, genocide memorials are today emerging as key sites of tourism. Bringing into sharp tension the interface between international and local communities, politics and education, and between economics and ethics, this research has, based on the idea that genocide memorialisation today holds a position of interest and significance within the international setting, investigated how memorial sites in Cambodia and Rwanda engage the Euro-Western visitor on both a cognitive and affective level. Today, as the world grows ever-smaller, the opportunities offered to us to engage the international landscape are many and far-reaching. Memorials, infused by this tension of the local and the global, offer highly concentrated places in which to investigate the processes of design and experience, and of design interpretation.

As proposed in the introduction to this study, this research aims to investigate Euro-Western experience and interpretation of the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda – two nations very different to each other, and two nations very different to Western communities. This chapter primarily looks at the process of design *interpretation* using the case study memorial sites as grounds for investigating the process of interpretation, specifically examining the relationship between design and the creation of individual consciousness and meaning. Returning to the three key research themes, global memories and tourism, the internationalisation of memorial design, and the transposition of interpretation through time and culture, this chapter will explore the idea of connecting with tragedy through landscapes of memory. Against the backdrop of Berlin's treatment of the public memoryscape of the Jewish Holocaust, the design, experience and interpretation of Cambodia and Rwanda's national genocide memorials will be investigated in terms of Euro-Western engagement and connection through site. This chapter will primarily ask how, through time, memorial design and interpretation may offer one opportunity to bridge the gap between past, present and future - between what happened, and how we know it in the present, between one generation and the next, between one culture and another, connecting time, space and self with the tragedy of genocide that on the surface seems distant and remote from our everyday, but in reality is a sad part of the human condition.

## 8.2 GLOBAL MEMORIES & TOURISM

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The memorial landscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda stand as representations of a public grief process engrossed in the demands of society, politics, and economics, directed to serve the specific needs of society surviving in the aftermath of genocide, and the multiple pressures, both internally and internationally that dictate the form and function and narrative told. The Holocaust, for example, as Stephen Smith states “*has not always been the prominent part of the cultural landscape it is today*” (Smith, 2002, p. 117).

Initially, in 1950, Yad Vashem was created and emerged as the memorial that provided a necessary and important focus for survivors and Jewish communities the world over. It was then perhaps the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 that started the development of public discourse in the light of the Holocaust. “*This first happened in Israel, and was followed by a slow but steady stream of responses from a variety of places and disciplines*” (Smith, 2002, p. 117). This, of course, did not happen all at once, there were milestones along the way. In 1978 President Jimmy Carter instituted the United States Holocaust Memorial Council which, fifteen years later, resulted in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. That same year, Kitty Hart-Moxom took a British film crew to Birkenau, and for perhaps the first time, a survivor described what had happened to her in the camp (Smith, 2002, p. 118). The fortieth anniversary of the liberation of the camps in 1985 was given television and radio time. When in 1988 Elisabeth Maxwell organised an international conference entitled ‘Remembering for the Future’, hundreds of scholars from around the world attended, and the field of Holocaust studies took another step forward, with the world consciousness growing further. Then came the museum and education facilities (Smith, 2002, p. 118). In Europe, the situation was more complex, with continental Europe divided. “*West German children learned history, history, history. Polish children learned that Auschwitz was the site of the martyrdom of Poland under the Nazis. The Soviets learned about the greatness of the Red Army in its heroic struggle to overthrow fascists who were murdering Soviet citizens. And the British learned virtually nothing*” (Smith, 2002, p. 119).

Today, across the world, an ever-widening community attempts to break down the barriers between people and their memories, and for European nations, places of remembrance and mourning the Holocaust have for over sixty years now, focused around the former Concentration and Extermination Camps, mass graves, and sites of execution and torture. As the war generation disappears, what yesterday and today could be narrated by first-hand witnesses must tomorrow be passed on through history: “*There is a shift underway from personal memory, individually certified, to a collective memory transmitted by knowledge*” (Thierse, 2005, p. 15). The importance of retaining the Concentration and Extermination Camp Memorials throughout Europe is therefore vitally important as spaces to experience the actual place of suffering - to offer a place to be close to the dead. Dr H.C. Paul Spiegel, President of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany states, “*Here immeasurable suffering was inflicted*

*on the members of families, relatives, friends and countless nameless victims. Here we were humiliated by our neighbours and fellow Germans, betrayed. And millions of us were murdered in the most cruel and horrible manner. Nowhere are we nearer to the dead, nowhere is there a more direct and comprehensive access to the atrocities perpetrated by the National Socialists than at these authentic sites”* (Spiegel, 2005, p. 26).

The relative peace that much of the West has experienced in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century has meant many of us today, born after World War II, have been cocooned in a relatively safe world. How do we then, visualise and tangibly conceive a tragedy such as genocide? As has been discussed throughout this study, the world we live in today is vastly different to that of any other time in history, where global communications, extensive media, the proliferation of popular film, and access to travel are more prevalent than ever. For example, KMC6 a participant at the Kigali Memorial Centre wrote, *“before I came to Rwanda I only had very little knowledge about the genocide – mostly from the movie “Hotel Rwanda”*. The affiliations that citizens of most Western nations today have with the Jewish Holocaust, and Nazi crimes during World War II is far-reaching and, as this research shows, defines our experience (either consciously or unconsciously) as Euro-Western citizens of genocide throughout the world. The existential phenomenological enquiry showed that even if participants had not visited a Holocaust Memorial site first-hand, they consistently still made reference in the questionnaire that they expected their experience of the genocide memorial sites in Cambodia and Rwanda to be similar. The Holocaust is today part of our pre-understanding as Euro-Western citizens with ‘Holocaust imagery’ today prevalent in our everyday. *“The “spectre” of Auschwitz has largely resulted from an interesting combination of formal education, social myth and creative artistic endeavour”* (Writing, 1988; cited in Mezga, 1990, p. 20). Mezga (1990) suggests that popular film, documentaries, novels, non-fiction accounts, poetry, sculpture, art, theatre and news accounts, have all attempted to touch upon the same aspect of the Auschwitz phenomenon (Mezga, 1990, p. 20). *“[T]hey have contributed to an evolving set of mental images and expectations which over time have become “Auschwitz”* (Writing, 1988, Landsman, 1985; cited in Mezga, 1990, p. 20). Mezga states *“the vast majority of people’s images or expectations have been formed through second-hand or indirect experiences”* (Mezga, 1990, p. 20). As participant CE8 wrote, *“My experience with genocide memorials only consisted of the experience I have had in Europe; visiting Holocaust museum, jewish historic museum, Anne-Frank house, camp Westerbork. We learn a lot about it during our school career. The genocide that took place in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime gets less attention. Offcourse you see movies and some television documentaries. But this was the first time I visited a non-European memorial of genocide/war.”* And KMC21Post, a participant in Rwanda wrote, *“I have been to Cambodia and a concentration camp outside of Munich. The surrealness of the events occurring at those places was similar.”*

### 8.3 INTERPRETATION & THE INTERNATIONALISING OF MEMORIAL DESIGN

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Returning to Bonta's 'Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation' (1974), the 'official interpretation' of site put forward by the respective governments of Cambodia and Rwanda, today continues to dominate the experience and interpretation of Euro-Western visitors to genocide memorial sites. From tourist pamphlets, web-site information, guide books, exhibitions and the didactic nature of site design itself, the experience of Euro-Western tourists to these memorial sites seems certainly directed by the 'official' interpretation.

For Rwanda, the genocide memoryscape that we see today emerged primarily from a need to bury the victims of the 1994 genocide, with each community bringing the dead to locations allocated for mass graves. A site located at Gisozi was initially allocated to house the genocide victims from Kigali. With the co-operation of the Aegis Trust however, the site that today houses over 258,000 victims is part of the Kigali Memorial Centre, which has the official aim to "*educate Rwandans in a culture of humanity and to advance the cause of ending genocide in Africa and the world*" (Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Culture, 1996; cited in Cook, 2006, p. 304). Steele states, "*the direct participation of Western consultants and Holocaust survivor artists in the construction of the site, the integration of tri-lingual exhibits and the inclusion of materials that seek to involve and engage an international audience suggests that it is not simply an unintended product of Western participation in the building of the Centre, but rather a reflection of a desire to engage a broader visitor base*" (Steele, 2006, p. 9). This approach deconstructs the genocide in Rwanda as a 'tribal' problem: "*By highlighting that genocide is not a symptom of African barbarity, but rather a violence that has been perpetrated in many societies these displays seek to break down ethicised narrative*" (Steele, 2006, p. 8). As KMC6, a participant at the Kigali Memorial Centre, wrote, "*The visit has been an unforgettable experience... Seeing young Rwandans afterwards I always asked myself if they are the "result" of rape and I felt extremely uncomfortable walking through time because I felt guilty for the European behavior before and during the genocide.*" The idea of the Rwandan government promoting an 'official interpretation' of the memorial site in Kigali of 'genocide as human problem', not 'genocide as Rwandan problem', and that the entire world must step-up and take responsibility for what happened there in 1994, is an issue that has been discussed previously in this research. The comments made by KMC6 would support the idea that this 'official' interpretation is succeeding at some level in terms of Euro-Western interpretation of the memorial site.

Today still struggling to manage genocide ideology, especially in Rwandan schools, the Rwandan government and Aegis Trust were acutely conscious of creating a memorial that educated on the overall process of genocide - the facts and the figures, the personal stories and narratives, and also the international context of genocide during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The

government, in attempting to stem the flow of genocide ideology is actively working to create a genocide education programme which will eventually be aided by the educational facility of the memorial centre. Participant KMC24Post noted, *“I just think it’s interesting how the cruelty of most of the murders was not mentioned. The cutting off of arms and legs and leaving people to bleed out. Murdering whole families one by one so they all have to watch. It’s not about anger though I suppose. Although I am in no position to say one way or the other. The memorial doesn’t seem to take sides. It is just presenting it all. Hutu should be able to visit to.”*

For Cambodia too, the official interpretation put forward by Vietnam seeking approval for their invasion and subsequent occupation of the war-torn nation continues to direct interpretation of the national memorial sites today. The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, like the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre are still primarily orientated around issues of preserving ‘first-hand’ evidences that will be inevitably called upon during the current genocide trials. In the strategic move by the then Vietnamese/Cambodian government to gain justification for invasion and occupation, journalists and photographers were given the opportunity to travel throughout Cambodia, see the mass graves and devastation, visit the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and take their stories home. As Ledgerwood observes, *“The theme of foreigners promising to return to their countries to tell people what “really” happened in Cambodia remains a dominant one throughout the years that visitors were signing the Tuol Sleng books”*, (Ledgerwood, 2002, p. 110) an action that fitted well with the intentions of the government of the time.

Although this tone of returning home and telling the story of Cambodia is still prevalent within the visitor books at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, some comments have begun to turn to today, and connections are indeed being made with the world as a whole, and humanity as a whole, collapsing the traditional boundaries of time and culture. With the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the West’s ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan and Iraq, the tone of some inserts in the visitor books from Euro-Western visitors speak of a globalised world hampered by the reoccurrence of tragic action. For example one visitor wrote in 2004: *“The USA supported the Khmer Rouge. Now they have their own S-21 in Guantanamo where they keep and torture people without trial.”* (9/8/2004). And another, *“Cambodia will never move forward unless they deal with this history. Why don’t the big shots like Bush and Blair help, instead of starting another war?”* (Ireland, 7/2/2003). And another, *“Hitler, Pol Pot, Milosovecic, whos next? (Bush?)”* (2002). Like much of the graffiti written and scratched into the walls of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (see Section 6.5.10), Euro-Western visitors appear to be connecting with site, despite the restrictions and constraints placed by the specific and singular narrative told. Below, is a discussion on how Euro-Western visitors to the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda are engaging with site and context through what I have termed here, ‘the shock and reality of death’, ‘the collapsing of time and space’ and ‘Euro-Western cues to connect’.

### 8.3.1 SHOCK & THE REALITY OF DEATH

Participant CE15 wrote of the Choeung EK Genocidal Centre, *“This appeared to be a very raw, still real site with so much evidence of what happened here . . . It brings real life tragic information to the visitors and is a great education. Very sad. Shocking and so hard to believe.”* The shock and reality of death expressed by the memorial sites in Cambodia and Rwanda seem to instinctively ‘speak’ to visitors, including foreign visitors such as Euro-Western citizens, through the ‘human’ expression of death and brutality. As sites of immense ‘human’ tragedy, the human responses of shock and sadness seem an innate reality of site and context that automatically engage the ‘human self’. An obvious response, the field research conducted as part of this study supports the notion that the expression of ‘death’ resonates with man across cultures, as each visitors considers their own mortality, and that of their family, friends, and community.

### 8.3.2 THE COLLAPSING OF TIME & SPACE

The destruction to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum caused by 30 years of underfunding, or indeed today no funding, sees the museum physically collapsing due to extensive mould and decay. A major factor in supporting the ‘un-mediated’ appearance of site, where traditional boundaries of time, space and culture collapse, Euro-Western visitors to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum are actively invited to experience, and encouraged to visualise prisoner life at S-21 as it would have been under Khmer Rouge control. Portrayed clearly through photographs taken by Euro-Western participants, this ‘insider–outsider’ experience (discussed and illustrated in detail in Chapter seven) was one had by many visitors who participated in the existential research. The human remains protruding out of the soil at the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre also supports and reinforces the ‘unmediated’ appearance of memorial sites in Cambodia, leading to an opportunity for Euro-Western visitors to make connection with the genocide, not only through the experience of horror and atrocity, but more importantly through the ‘human tragedy’ expressed by site. CE3 wrote of their experience at the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, *“Impossible to fathom how events such as this could happen in such recent times and how humans can inflict such pain and suffering to others.”* CE13Post, another participant to the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre wrote, *“It is humbling and tragic and sad that this kind of thing goes on and the rest of the world lives on self absorbed, oblivious, not acting . . . It is a tragedy that humans can do this to others . . . I feel it is important that we remind ourselves of what has happened, to remember those who suffered, and consider those who continue to suffer, and to have a sense of the grief of the Cambodian people as I believe as human beings, we share in that grief on a level if we don’t realise it ..”*

The Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda does not offer to the same extent the ‘raw’ unmediated first-hand experience such as that at the Cambodian memorials, but is best described as a logical and ‘dignified’ memorial. KMC4 wrote: *“The Kigali Memorial Centre is a place of high dignity. The exhibition about the history of Rwanda and the genocide is implemented in a room with dim light. Everything is build up in a circle, perhaps for symbolising that the end*

*might be another beginning – one has to remember and be aware that something like that never happens again.”* For Euro-Western visitors however, used to this ‘distanced’ and technologically mediated style common in our Western museums, do find themselves engaged with site, in contrast to the more confrontational experience in Cambodia. Details of the brutal killings and reality of life in Rwanda during the genocide are portrayed through graphic photography and touch-screen panels that show interviews with survivors in three languages. KMC21Post wrote, *“The subtleties of the space was impressive. In my mind a memorial centre should be a peaceful place. It should not stand out terribly from its surroundings. It should be a place where someone can explore and feel at ease. . . The centre was well laid out in a circular fashion so that you could continue along the path of the story and images in a holistic way. It was a fitting way to walk through a history that must come full circle. The people and the culture can only find itself again by re-learning the ways that it once was.”* Comments made with reference to the symbolic circular design of the main exhibition space again reinforces the concept that Euro-Western visitors are indeed connecting with the site and genocide through design.

The air-conditioned Kigali Memorial Centre is a far cry from the damp, humid and disorganised sites in Cambodia, where human remains can be accidentally scuffed with the foot as one treads tentatively through the ‘killing fields’ at the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, or deliberately touched in the open displays. KMC4 writes about the Kigali Memorial Centre, *“The exhibition gives comprehensive information about the genocide and no one can stay unaffected by what he sees there. But the peaceful garden outside helps to bring ones feelings back to balance. Although the graves on the premises of the Memorial are mass graves, they possess a high degree of dignity due to the careful architecture of the memorial. It is a perfect place to pray for the victims and to remind people what terrible things can be caused by hate.”* Acknowledging the all-encompassing human issue of ‘hate’ that offers the root of genocide and so many other human atrocities in the world, KMC4 shows that the experience of visiting the Kigali Memorial Centre offers more than just the ‘distanced’ experience expressed through the mediated memorial. Visitors to the Kigali Memorial Centre undeniably recognise, and are purposefully directed to the wider issues represented by the memorial. KMC2 writes, *“It [is] something that has a great impact on one personally and might help prevent future genocides or at least recognize the beginnings of one.”*

The genocide in Rwanda happened just 15 years ago, and the signs of atrocity are evident everywhere you turn. From the truck loads of genocide perpetrators in their pink uniforms being transported to the field each day for work, to the rusty-red clay roads meandering up each hill so reminiscent of killing scenes depicted in films of the Rwanda genocide, to the numerous mass grave sites dotting the countryside, each with the sign ‘Never Again’. Participant KMC24Post depicted the idea of genocide and the everyday in the passage she wrote: *“I almost feel like the country is a memorial in itself. I hate that I do it, but when I’m walking through the city or Nyamirambo or looking down at a valley, I almost always find myself wondering about the people who were murdered there. I imagine corpse lined streets*

*and well, you get the idea. It's not that I'm haunted by it in any way or it scares me, I just can't stop thinking about it."*

As described by participants throughout the existential research, the horror of genocide itself clearly connects with Euro-Western visitors through its very nature as an unfathomable, barbaric, 'un-human' tragedy inflicted by the choices of man. Encouraged to participate in the phenomenologically commanding visualisation of living through genocide, the memorial sites in Cambodia and Rwanda add to this sense of human fragility - of man's capability to kill. In addition to this underlying narrative presented through the mindful thought of almost anybody visiting a nation surviving in the aftermath of genocide, is the added layer of 'designed' Euro-Western 'cues to connect'. Identified and introduced in Chapter six, and described in detail in Chapter seven through the discussion of existential phenomenological data collected, the phenomenon and practice of Euro-Western 'cues to connect', and their ultimate direction in shaping Euro-Western interpretation of memorial sites in Cambodia and Rwanda is discussed below.

### **8.3.3 EURO – WESTERN ‘CUES TO CONNECT’**

Analysis of the existential data has shown in detail throughout Chapter seven that Euro-Western visitors respond at some level to 'cues' that engage our 'pre-understanding' of site and context, principally through our understanding of the culture and tradition of memorialisation within the West, particularly with regard to memorialisation of the Jewish Holocaust. Each case study site fulfilled at different levels 'pre-determined' culturally formed expectations for the participants. Explored through an investigation of the experiential qualities of site, Euro-Western connection with place and people was seen to cross the boundaries of culture and geographic location.

In terms of site design, the issue of whether or not the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was designed and developed to resemble a 'Holocaust' memorial is an issue argued positively for by French sociologist Serge Thion. He argues "*that parallels to Nazi camps were deliberately constructed when the museum was 'refurbished' by Vietnamese experts, in an effort to attract part of the sinister charisma of Auschwitz*" (Thion, 1993, p. 182). Whether this is accurate or not, (as we will never fully understand the internal discussions that went on in Cambodia and Vietnam when the memorial was being constructed) elements of site design at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, as well as the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, clearly emanate certain Euro-Western 'cues to connect'. For the Kigali Memorial Centre, a memorial built for the 10 year anniversary of the genocide in 2004, the memorial complex would undoubtedly resonate with Euro-Western themes due to the input and direction provided by the UK based Aegis Trust. Below, this research will discuss the site and contextual interpretations of Euro-Western visitors promoted through site design at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre and the Kigali Memorial Centre, and will consider what is 'realised' in terms of personal 'connection' through design interpretation. Again, as Tonkin and Laurence

describe “*each individual must take on their own death and mortality. In this way, memorials are always about the present, and can only be “read” in relation to the viewer’s own present – “How would I feel if this happened to me?”*” (Tonkin & Laurence, 2003, pp. 48-49).

Experiencing the vastness of death in Cambodia and Rwanda during the periods of genocide is an aspect of site that almost all participants responded to. Similar to the familiar long lists of war dead found on traditional stone monuments or fields of infinite white crosses in war cemeteries throughout the Western world, the sheer numbers of dead portrayed through the lists of names, rooms of photos, or the continued extension of mass graves, strongly engaged the Euro-Western visitor. The phenomenologically powerful statement made by the experiential qualities of torture equipment also proved to engage the Euro-Western visitor. Much like the retention and display of crematorium furnaces in Concentration and Extermination Camps throughout Europe, the sheer rawness of unimaginable circumstances again was shown to resonate with Euro-Western visitors, who recorded primarily through photos, their mindful engagement with these site artefacts. The display of victim belongings, such as is also commonly seen at Concentration and Extermination Camp memorials throughout Europe, was also shown in this research to engage the Euro-Western visitor. Different to seeing the ‘altered’ human appearance of a human skull for instance, victim clothing, unchanged in appearance from the time it was worn by the victim, echoes a ‘realness’ with Euro-Western visitors who can connect, through this most basic and ‘everyday’ human item.

Another ‘cue’ to connect for Euro-Western visitors is the graveyards associated with each of the memorial sites. Again, a reality for all human beings, death and its representation through the ‘graveyard’ narrates the story of human loss, regardless of cultural difference. For the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, the graves to the last fourteen victims found at S-21 could be described as strongly resembling a European graveyard. Its uniform rows of elevated concrete white graves narrate a familiar story of death to the Euro-Western visitor. For the mass grave sites at the Choeng Ek Genocidal Centre, and the Kigali Memorial Centre, death, an inevitably end for all human beings also communicates a story we all understand.

In terms of the provision for information gathering, which was, for most Euro-Western participants a primary goal, each site fulfilled this agenda at different levels. For example, some Euro-Western participants, who are used to being ‘fed’ information from every direction, through every media possible, appeared to find the Choeng Ek Genocidal Centre difficult to interpret. For example CE13Post wrote of the Choeng Ek Genocidal Centre, “*This site could have been so much better signposted and explanations would have helped me get a lot more from the visit. I found S-21 much better in this regard.*” The extreme un-mediated appearance of the Choeng Ek Genocidal Centre also proved difficult for many participants to comprehend. CE6 also stated “*when I visited the Memorial [Choeng Ek], I couldn’t feel any special atmosphere. It looks more like a place just to get money from tourists.... I find it sad, because it should be only (or mainly) a memorial. The text, information are very light, and I*

*couldn't really realise how big was this killing field. I don't even know tonight how many people died in Cambodia because of Khmer Rouge.”* The inclusion by many participants of photos portraying both ‘object’ and ‘caption’, by way of on-site sign at the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre supports this notion of participants striving to collect information, to visually document aspects of site important to their experience and remembrance. The clean, ‘distanced’ and mediated appearance of the Kigali Memorial Centre however proved more satisfactory in terms of fulfilling the ‘informational’ experience of the visit for Euro-Western visitors. For example KMC6 wrote, *“Very well set up museum! The horror is presented very well, I think it is not too much but enough to make you understand the horrific genocide. I liked the set up way / path you have to follow. The videoclips are good. They give you a time out from reading the boards and personalize the genocide. I liked the set-up: background info, genocide itself, life after the genocide. I liked the fact they only asked for donations and no entry fee. They might even get more money out of it as people like to give money to such a well organized museum and leaving the museum you are in a money spending mood after seeing what happened to the people. The pictures and stories of the individual children upstairs stayed in my mind the most.”*

### **8.3.4 BONTA & THE DESIGN INTERPRETATION OF POST GENOCIDE MEMORYSCAPES**

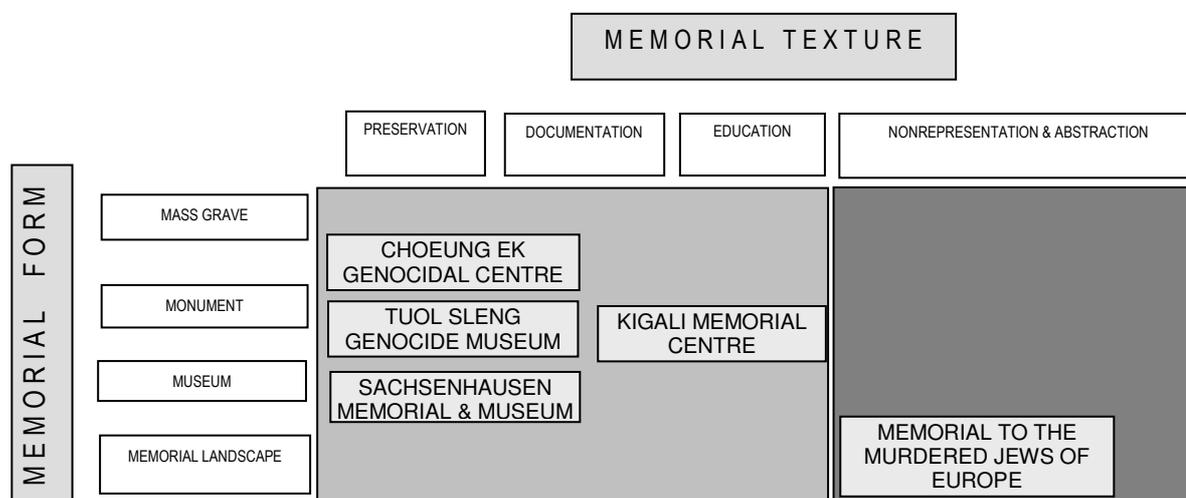
Clearly able to connect across culture today, this research has shown that the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda engage the Euro-Western visitor through multiple ways, including the on-site designed ‘cues’ that respond to our cultural pre-understanding. Returning to Bonta’s *Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation* (1974), by placing the theory of ‘cues to connect’ within the nine stages of interpretation, the visual and cultural ‘cues’ discussed in detail in Chapters six and seven, have indeed become, in terms of Euro-Western interpretation, the ‘canon’ – the interpretive phenomena that develops when a particular interpretation crystallises, when an interpretation is collectively developed and a social consensus is met (Bonta, 1974, pp. 62-66). With canonic understandings, *“Individuals learn the meaning, rather than construct or reconstruct it themselves”* (Bonta, 1974, p. 66). In this way, through ‘knowing’ the canon of memorialisation in the West, and in particular memorialisation to the Jewish Holocaust, ‘Euro-Western cues to connect’ identified either consciously or unconsciously by visitors to the memorial sites in Cambodia and Rwanda engage Euro-Western tourists with site and context through a language of expression that they accept and understand. This canon, shaped and to this day supported by the ‘official interpretation’ offered by those involved in the creation of each case study site, has today, through the global processes of media, knowledge transmission and travel identified Holocaust memorialisation as a ‘class’ of interpretation, and has been disseminated throughout the world as a universal tool for interpreting the memorialisation of genocide.

Considering the above investigation therefore, the discussion continues below as an extension to the existing enquiry, and looks at the ability of memorial design to transpose these 'connections' or cultural engagements, through time. Acknowledging the idea that the needs of society change and evolve through time, the investigation continues by exploring the extent to which post genocide memoryscapes can evolve with the changing needs of society, and in so doing, secure their place within the cultural landscape for years to come.

## 8.4 THE TRANSPOSITION OF INTERPRETATION - THE MOVEMENT OF MEANING

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In terms of coming to ‘know’ tragedy through memorial design, the attempt to make architecture speak is common, and ‘architecture parlanté’, a term coined in the late nineteenth century, dominates genocide memorialisation as has been seen in each of the case study sites in Cambodia and Rwanda, where site design and content have focussed strongly on the didactic, where interpretation is directed, and thought bounded within a particular memory. In Berlin too, this genre makes a significant appearance in many memorials. Berlin’s most recent memorial however, Eisenman’s (2005) Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, rejects this literal speech or architectural parlanté, which Eisenman believes, leaves the visitor little freedom for interpretation (da Costa Meyer, 2006). It is towards this issue of freedom of thought, and the promotion of individual interpretation that this study now moves. As James Young believes, monuments that resist or oppose transformation - the transposition of interpretation - risk losing their significance to future generations (Young, 1993). Unlike a piece of architecture or public art however, a memorial to genocide does not fit into the normal expectations of design interpretation due to the immense historical, cultural and emotional significance. For the ‘traditional’ genocide memorial often located at a ‘sacred’ site, and orientated around issues of preservation and documentation, any attempt at individual design interpretation is difficult, and may even be inappropriate. With the opening of Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in 2005 however, an exciting opportunity was given to explore the possible interpretive potential for an ‘abstract/non-representational’ memorial ‘layer’ within the Berlin landscape of Holocaust memory. Figure 8.1 below illustrates the relationship between memorial form and texture with regard to each of the sites discussed within this research. Reiterating the idea that the post genocide memorial sites of Cambodia and Rwanda focus on issues of preservation, documentation and education, the diagram below also illustrates the example of Berlin’s post genocide memoryscape, and in particular, the addition of Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.



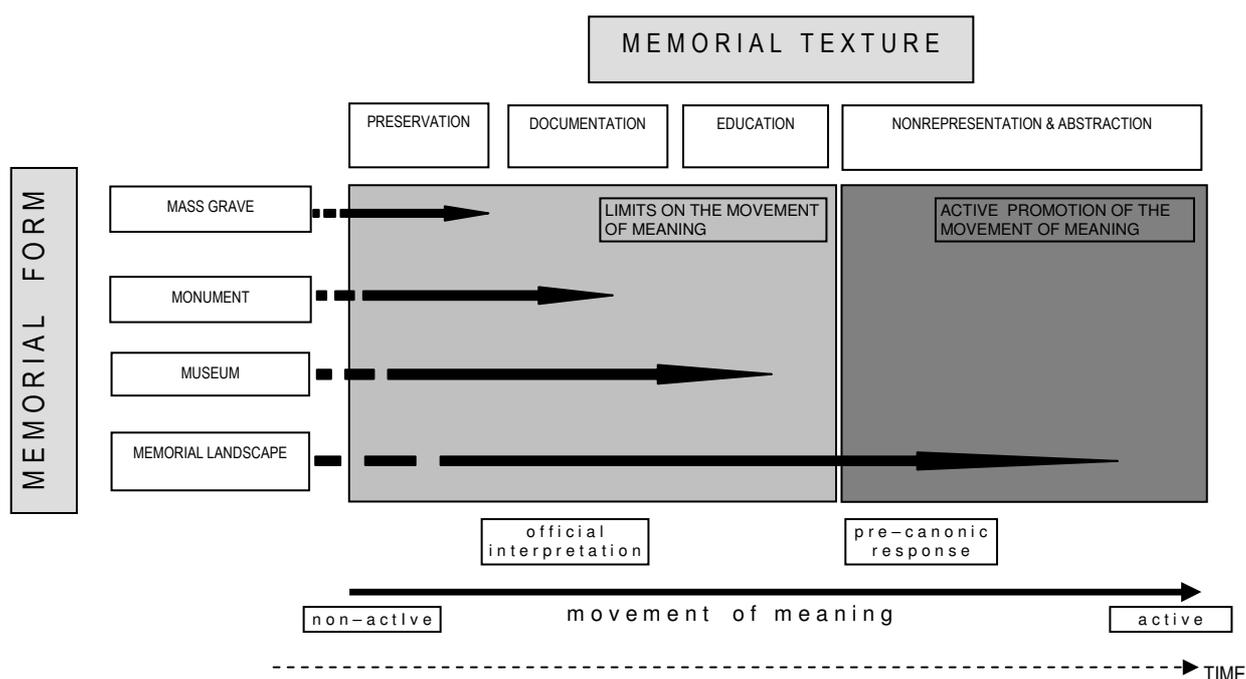
**Fig. 8.1**

Memorial Texture and Form – Cambodia, Rwanda and Germany

## 8.4.1 DESIGN INTERPRETATION

### & THE MOVEMENT OF MEANING

In addition to illustrating the relationship between memorial form and texture, figure 8.2 below illustrates diagrammatically the proposed investigation into what I have termed here the ‘movement of meaning’ through time, through an ‘openness’ or less-bounded memorial design that allows for, or encourages the practise of individual ‘pre-canonic’ interpretive response. As can be seen from the diagram, traditional memorials that generally include mass graves, monuments, and museums, that are orientated around the textures of preservation, documentation and education, limit, by their very nature as representations of actual place, artefact and factual information, the interpretation of site for visitors, often limiting interpretation to that of the ‘official interpretation’ of the time. Memorials however that encompass the design strategies of abstraction and non-representation may offer the best possibility to investigate the ‘movement of meaning’ within genocide memoryscapes, a type of memorialisation that has, until now, been almost solely orientated around representational memorialisation where individual self-reflective interpretation was not possible or even appropriate.

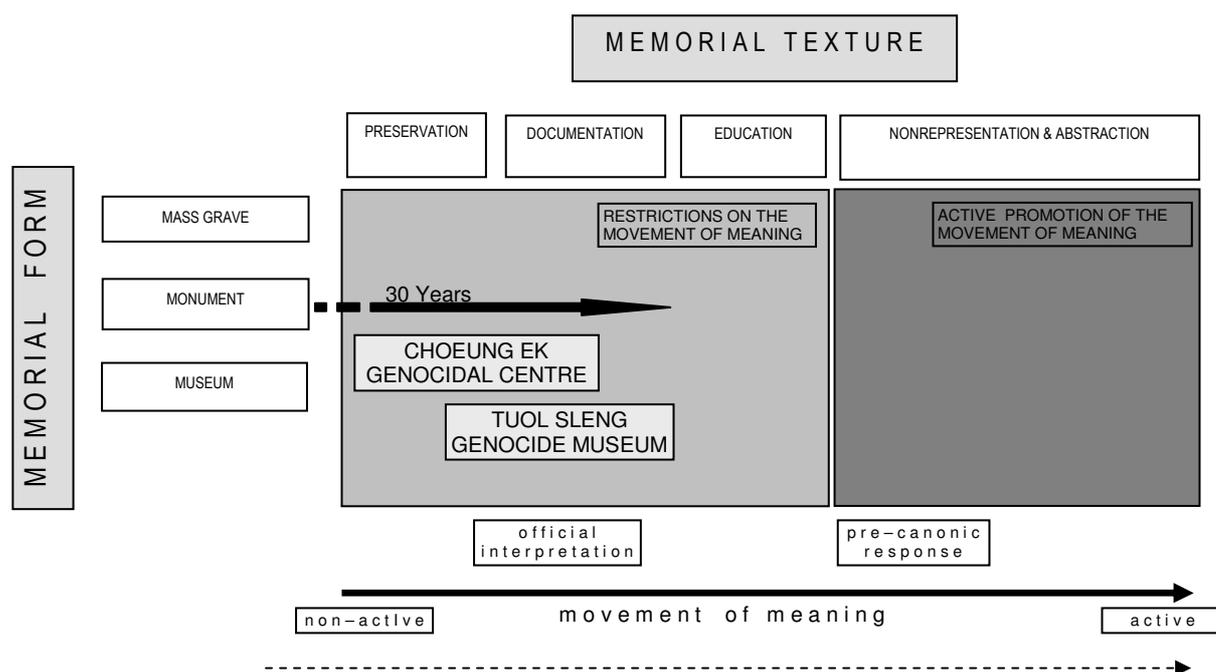


**Fig. 8.2**

Memorial Form and texture, and the movement of meaning

In terms of design interpretation, the very nature of Cambodia’s national genocide memorials, one being a former prison, and the other a killing field, are ultimately spaces emerging from real use in real time. Bonta’s initial interpretive stages of ‘blindness’ and ‘pre-canonic interpretation’ therefore were not present for either local or international visitors. From March 1979, when the museum was first opened to foreign journalists and diplomats, a strong ‘official interpretation’ stamped its mark and placed issues of documentation and preservation at the forefront of site interpretation. This research has shown that international visitors today are

strongly directed towards seeing the memorials in the ‘official’ light, set alongside the canon established by ‘Holocaust memorialisation’. Achieved through information pamphlets collected at the ticket kiosk, through travel guides and tourist brochures, through text on site, and at the core of this research, through the memorial design itself, and interpretation of Cambodia’s post genocide memoryscape, has today moved through ‘canonic’, ‘class identification’ and ‘dissemination’ stages of interpretation, all dominated however by the ‘official interpretation’ offered in 1979. Below, figure 8.3 considers the national memorial sites of the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre as they stand today, 30 years after the fall of Pol Pot, in relation to the key design issues considered within this research of design form, memorial texture, and the ‘movement of meaning’.



**Fig. 8.3**

The Cambodian memoryscape and the movement of meaning

As has been discussed, the Kigali Memorial Centre was purpose built in conjunction with a Western charity. Stephen Smith of the Aegis Trust has stated that his aim for the development of the Centre in future years is to move and develop with the changing needs of society. He states of the Kigali Memorial Centre, “*Very often in front of the word ‘museum’ comes either ‘permanent’ of ‘static’. This museum is neither permanent nor static, it’s a dynamic conversation between this community and that building and what will happen is, I would hope, is that when we come back after 15 years, 20 years after the genocide, 25 years after the genocide, if you find the same museum there, I shall be very disappointed. Its got to change, its got to evolve, its got to emerge with the narrative that comes out of the people that are flowing through it*” (Smith; cited in Aegis Trust, n.d.). Today however, the still relatively young memorial site of the Kigali Memorial Centre sits within a generation of Rwandans who were directly affected by the 1994 genocide. Focused therefore on aspects of documentation and education, the texture of the memorial today certainly seems ‘appropriate’ especially in the current light of issues with genocide ideology in Rwandan schools. A place to bury the dead in

a dignified and sanitary manner, a place for family and friends to mourn the victims, a place for school groups to go and learn about the process of genocide, both in Rwanda and internationally, and a place for international visitors to learn and pay their respects to the 258,000 victims buried on site, the 800,000 victims killed in total during the 1994 killings, and the millions of genocide victims worldwide. As above, figure 8.4 illustrates the national Rwandan memorial site of the Kigali Memorial Centre in relation to the key design issues considered within this research of form, texture, and the ‘movement of meaning’ over time.

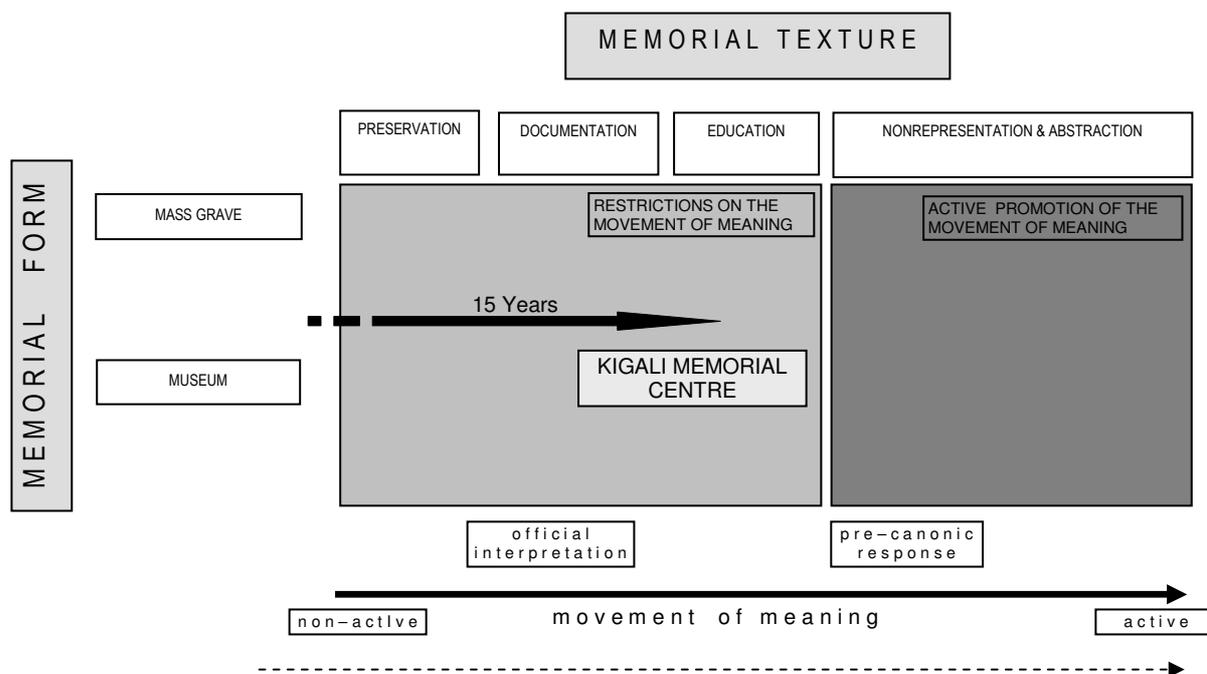


Fig. 8.4

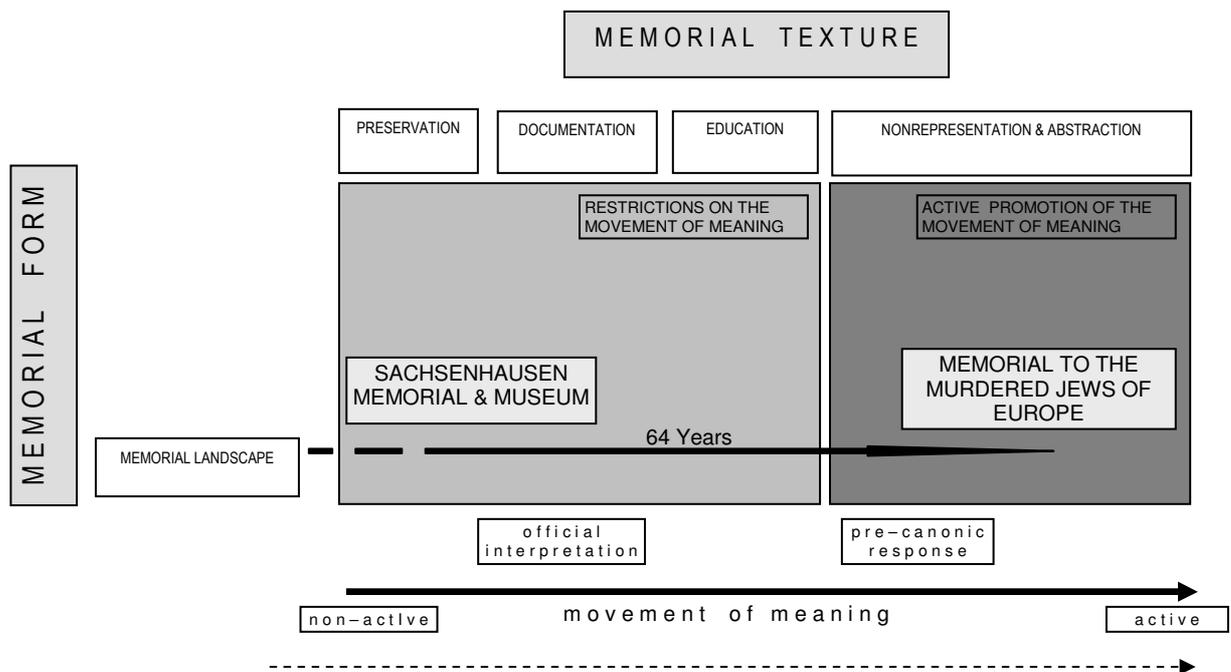
The Rwandan memoryscape and the movement of meaning

Sixty years of post genocide development has seen the German memoryscape of genocide and Nazi crimes primarily contribute to a landscape of preservation and documentation of first-hand evidences. In 2005 however, with the creation of Peter Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, a question was answered that had persisted in both German and international society for 60 years - ‘what room would Germany allow the memory of its Nazi past, and the Jewish Holocaust?’ On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 2005, the answer was laid in stone with the opening of the new memorial in central Berlin. It was stated by the American Judaic Studies specialist James Young, that no other nation had ever undertaken an experiment to “reunite on the stony subsoil of the memory of its crimes, or to place the remembrance of these crimes in the geographic centre of its capital” (Young, 2005; cited Thierse, 2005, pp. 14-15). With the opening of Eisenman’s memorial, a new step forward in genocide memorialisation was taken - a new layer of expression developed, and a new generation of memorial realised that communicates the memory of the Jewish Holocaust. Peter Eisenman, at the opening ceremony of the memorial said, “Our purposes have been twofold. First was to establish a permanent memory, to record what has been in this capital city. Second, and perhaps more importantly, was to begin a debate with the openendedness that is proposed by such a project, allowing future generations to draw their own conclusions. Not to direct them what to think,

*but allow them to think*" (Eisenman, 2005b, pp. 30-31). Thus, the official interpretation is that there is no given narrative or symbolism. "*Visitors are . . . thrown back on their own resources. There are no instructions for the proper or 'correct' use*" (Schlor, 2005, p. 45). Bearing no single entrance, no centre, no endpoint, and no explanation, the memorial stands today as a prompt for individual interpretation. This openness, this awareness that the needs and challenges that face society change with time, and thus must evolve, continuing to connect and challenge people from different places and different times, is core to this research. Dr Spiegel, at the opening ceremony of Eisenman's memorial, spoke of the importance of retaining and appreciating the memorial sites focused on preservation and documentation, "*It would be not only regrettable but a downright scandal if these sites of remembrance over the longer term were to pay a price for the creation of the Holocaust Memorial [Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe]*" (Spiegel, 2005, p. 26). Indicating the importance of historical layers within the memoryscape Spiegel continues, "*without historical memory, without the authentic places of annihilation, every abstract memorial will, in the long run, lose its effect as a sign against forgetting*" (Spiegel, 2005, p. 26). The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe when considered within the wider memoryscape of Germany today will stand for years to come as a point of remembrance - a centre for memory. Located in the heart of Berlin, the memorial represents the very boundary of human civilisation. "*May it contribute to keeping alive the memory which threatens to grow dim as the voices of the contemporary witnesses to the Holocaust fall silent*" (Spiegel, 2005, p. 27).

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe has signalled a new approach to the memorialisation of genocide. Removed from a specific place of tragedy, the Memorial offers today space for 'pre-canonic' or self interpretation. Forming a key public space as much as a Holocaust Memorial, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe stands as a world leader in a new generation of genocide memorialisation. The information centre, required by the Berlin Council, was carefully designed into the site to minimise any disturbance to the Memorial's field of stelae. A point of contention for Eisenman, and indeed Richard Serra who chose to leave the design team after this directive was put in stone, the information centre today extends the stelae of the field into the substructure of the information centre below "*provoking a continued state of reflection and contemplation once inside*" (Eisenman, 2005a, p. 11).

This is a new generation memorial, where the 'informational' didactic layer of 'architectural parlante' is layered with a non-representational space for 'willed participation' by the visitor, for contemplation and for reflection, that when considered along Bonta's stages of architectural interpretation, a 'pre-canonic response', the most individually powerful of all understandings, is initiated time and time again. Below, figure 8.5 illustrates the placement of Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, again with regard to the key design elements considered within this research – form, texture and the 'movement of meaning'.



**Fig. 8.5**

The Berlin memoryscape and the movement of meaning

Returning to the actuality that most Euro-Western participants to the case study sites in Cambodia and Rwanda stated that they had little specific knowledge of the genocides in those nations prior to visiting them and their memorial sites, the idea that memoryscapes of genocide must become 'layered' landscapes, is reinforced, where sites of preservation and documentation are translucently layered beside sites of education – and where these important and didactically focused sites, giving an informational base as needed, are layered with sites of memorialisation where abstract and non-representational space for connection in the present is encouraged.

Resisting different or 'alternative interpretations', the memoryscapes of genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda today have a certain inertia due to their singular burden of particular memory focused on preservation, documentation and education, that actively resist 'different' or evolving interpretations. The less 'burdened' narrative of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is more open to the movement of meaning. Able to rely on the many documentative memorials already located throughout Europe, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe has the comfort of knowing that the particular story of the Jewish Holocaust and Nazi crimes will forever be told didactically through these memorials where first-hand evidences are kept, leaving it to fulfil a space, a public space in central Berlin where man is not 'told' what to think, but where man is encouraged to think, making personal connection and engaging with site in an individually meaningful way.

## 8.5 CONCLUSION

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As this research has shown, obvious and genuine connection was certainly made by participants to the ‘traditional’ information based case study memorial sites considered within this research orientated around issues of preservation, documentation and education. Amplified emotion, directed by a pre-understanding formulated by the Western experience of the Jewish Holocaust and Nazi crimes during WWII, the sheer shock at the magnitude and raw reality of genocide, and ‘being in time’ experiencing the site, context and people directly affected by the tragedy of genocide, Euro-Western participants today indeed find connection, both through collective and personal pre-understanding and on-site experience. Restricted to some extent by the limits of interpretation constrained by relevance in time, language and an ever-changing society, the memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda, may, I believe, run the risk of being mired in the ‘information and education’ mode, unchanging with the world around them. There is also a risk that today’s media-drenched world which offers information at the press of a button is hampering the passage into a form of representation which requires more of the visitor – asking that they not simply stand, stare, and store, but that they become cognitively and emotionally involved. Vitally important to the landscape of memory, these sites will always be sacred and pivotal places within post genocide nations, but as is today seen with the hopes and expectations of Berlin’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, ‘new’ generation memorials, dedicated to the practice of self reflection and individual interpretation in the present, that challenges the ‘everyday’, may have the greatest ability to prompt ‘the self’ – individual reflective self-interpretation. When read as a layer of memory, with that of the established memoryscape, the memory of the Jewish Holocaust will stand firm in our ever-changing world, speaking through generations, culture, ethnicity and religion.