

A Call for Landscape Ephemera in Times of War Reimagining Memorial Design for the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract | A review on a relation between flowers and the war memorials shows strong and multi-dimensional integration.

Focusing on the establishment and the essential purpose that memorials serve, this paper reviews three twentieth-century social movements as case studies, which directly involved the public ground and the use of landscape ephemera, particularly flowers, in response to war: The WWI war shrine-, the WWI+II war-gardening-, and Vietnam War-era “flower power” movement—one to mourn the loss of war, one to support the war, and one to protest the war. At the end the paper notes that recalling flowers in certain purposes may be an answer for the new generation of war memorial in the recent universal front.

Keywords | Landscape Ephemera, War, Memorial Design, War Memorial.

Introduction | As a civilian, one often experiences war as loss, a deletion or an undoing of existing structures, relations, and comforts. For many it has become something experienced from a distance. With changes in technology, even soldiers may remain a thousand meters above the battlefield or control drones remotely from even farther away. In fact, for those left at home, the battle-"field", that is, the traditional ground on which a battle is fought, is receding into the back-ground of the spectacle of war. The World Wars of the twentieth century challenged the notion of the war "front": The battlefield, which until then had marked with a line the armed frontier between opposing forces, ceded to a new kind of ground zero. In the face of "total war," the front both multiplied and disappeared. And at home, the civilian experience of war began verging on virtual.

To address the "site-less" war experience back home, and the rising number of soldiers whose dead bodies were unidentified, cities began erecting monuments and memorials. However, it has become evident that while traditional sculptural and architectural memorials positioned in public spaces may continue to be used as sites for Remembrance- or Armistice Day parades, their stony masses made to last for centuries do not lie at the heart of a successful war memorial. That is, the success of a memorial is contingent on more than its physical permanence and may, in fact, lie in nearly all of its other characteristics—its public-ness, its central location, and the space that it occupies. Working with rather than against time, a memorial landscape presents the opportunity for an alternative approach to mourning that embraces quite the opposite: the ephemeral.

In contrast to the time-scale of architectural war monuments, which may have sacrificed qualities of the human scale, our experience of landscape ephemera is direct and personal. As ephemera—existing but for a brief time—flowers are individual, and set into a bouquet or a garden, as individual as a civilian within a community or a soldier in a battalion. Though as short-lived as a makeshift shrine, planted, potted, or cut, they instill in us a sense of hope and have accompanied us in mourning death for time immemorial; they may be fleeting, but they are also perpetual, for landscapes do not weather—they grow. Indeed, flowers and war share more than a fleeting bond. In the hands of the civilian on the home front, they are deeply political, whether they revere a killed soldier, celebrate a victory, or protest a nation's war efforts. And in rethinking the criteria for twenty-first century war memorials, these occurrences of flowers in war may hint at more immediate mourning practices that reflect current events by allowing for change.

Landscapes of war experienced on the home front are thus defined by both a dual-space, a site to stand in for a "site-less" instance, as well as a unique dual-time, in which a past event is marked for future occurrences of remembering. If memorial sites cultivate memory, then the critical

consideration is whose memory; the subject and object of remembering are not givens. For memorial landscapes, the landscape architect, then, is tasked with not only a spatial, or even temporal problematic, but certainly also a social one. Focusing on the establishment and the essential purpose that memorials serve, this paper reviews three twentieth-century social movements as case studies, which directly involved the public ground and the use of landscape ephemera, particularly flowers, in response to war: The WWI war shrine-, the WWI+II war-gardening-, and Vietnam War-era "flower power" movement—one to mourn the loss of war, one to support the war, and one to protest the war.

Makeshift Street Shrines: Mourning the Great War

Tossing a flower on the grave of a loved one is such a universal image that we hardly know its origin. The practice is literally as old as the sedentary lifestyle itself: impressions of flowers have been found in ancient burial pits from nearly 14,000 years ago (Nadel et al, 2013). And floral tributes remained a tradition in many cultures. One of the most robust traditions stems from Britain, where during the Victorian era, citizens were schooled in a mourning etiquette. Instruction manuals taught people how, when, and where to grieve the deceased. But when the First World War brought home thousands of killed soldiers, many of whom were unidentifiable, people suddenly lacked a site for grieving, for the site of tragedy remained nothing more and nothing less than an inaccessible, distant battleground. Even the casket was left empty. Previously, graves had granted the comforting effect of "engraving," inscribing a place, typically in a churchyard, for remembrance. But the sheer scale of this loss displaced any familiar form of grieving. With neither sacred ground nor a postwar memorial at which to lay flowers, a new kind of "memorial" emerged: Makeshift wartime Street shrines sprang up to establish both- a new sacred ground and a simultaneous, immediate form of public mourning.

Tombs of the Unknown Soldier appeared as monuments dedicated to the services of an unknown soldier, allowing England to symbolically bury all of the unidentified soldiers killed in any war. As Alex King states in *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, "It was a way which did not depend on stories about a selection of exemplary heroes, but on concern for the vulnerability of the ordinary citizen-soldier. Personal acquaintance and attachment were transformed through commemorative acts into a public affirmation of support for those engaged in the fighting." (King, 1998: 60). Such collective monuments and empty tombs ("cenotaphs" dedicated to soldiers buried elsewhere) not only reflected a shift from celebrating individual high-profile war heroes to commemorating the common soldier, but through their at first temporary status, also a new form of public mourning, which took place at the time of war, rather than in its wake, for as King writes, "Commemoration of the

war dead was not simply a retrospective activity."(Ibid). As mourners, the people demanded spaces to share "the rawness of the grief"(Connelly, 2001) even amidst the circumstances of war.

Through the construction of war shrines mourners became civic pilgrims; through the laying of flowers mourners established sacred ground for the common good. Primarily because they were attended -or simply tended-, "Both the Cenotaph and grave of the Unknown Warrior remained sacred places throughout the 1920s"(Lloyd, 1998: 92). Even at the earliest large-scale, spontaneous shrines, "homage to servicemen was expressed in massive attendances to lay flowers on shrines."(King, 1998: 60). Both the empty tombs and especially the earlier temporary shrines would have ceased to exist in the absence of the attendance of mourners. In this way, the mourners tended the shrines and tombs with their mere presence—a presence marked and extended by the form of a delicate cut flower. "Through equally well-established conventions of reverence"—once a wooden cross, now a flower—"individuals could assist in affirming the sanctity of a memorial."(Idem: 231). But these shrines were unlike the traditional Catholic, out-of-the-way pilgrimage shrines, which tested faith in endurance; the mourners occupied the most utilized public space. As such, the pilgrimage became, primarily, not a religious, but a civil act.

Flowers established both the sites themselves and their sanctity through the collective effort of individuals. The ritual of flower laying culminated in 1918 with the great shrine in Hyde Park, the popularity of which led to the erection of a more permanent memorial, namely the Cenotaph, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. (Pic. 1) David William Lloyd points out that it, too, "was erected to provide a place for people to leave their offerings of flowers, which were to symbolise the Empire's tribute to the graves of the dead. On the first day... at least 70,000 floral bunches were left there."(Daily Express, 5 Aug. 1918, in Lloyd, 1998: 59). In a time when many still believed that the spirits of the fallen were not yet extinguished, neither by the war nor the Armistice, the Cenotaph also served as a site for "the continuing presence of the dead."(Lloyd, 1998: 62-63). At the pilgrimage to the Cenotaph on Armistice Day 1919, a columnist observed during the ceremony's two-minute silence: "You could vow the deep flowers took the shapes of the dead they covered; and the sweet, heavy scents spread from a flowered battlefield."(Daily Mail, 12 Nov. 1919, in Lloyd, 1998: 62-63). The memorial, then, not only enshrined the dead, but—through a plethora of floral tributes resembling a flower garden or a field—actually gave shape to the lost spirits, producing the illusion of a last viewing.

'Grow your own': War-Gardening on the Home Front
In the same year that the great shrine in Hyde Park



Pic 1: "The Cenotaph at Whitehall, 1920." Scenes at the Cenotaph just after the unveiling ceremony by King George V, November 1920, 11. Source: Horace Nicholls (photographer), Imperial War Museum Photograph Archive Collection, Q 31494.

finally came down and the Cenotaph celebrated its first Armistice Day, the United States propaganda effort coined the phrase "home front." (www.Etymonline.com). While "the pilgrimages to the Cenotaph brought wartime commemoration into the post-war world," (Lloyd, 1998:62) U.S. government agencies brought the battlefield from Europe home to American soil: "The battle front in Europe is not the only American front. There is a home front, and our people at home should be as patriotic as our men in uniform in foreign lands." Although the motive differed, the establishment of a home front resembles the makeshift war shrines in two ways: it claims a piece of public ground as a "non-site," (Smithson, 1996) an analog to compliment or stand in for a distant and inaccessible site, and it relies on civil engagement. Bringing these aspects together, it becomes evident that action is what connects the two sites; in order for action to "take place," a site must be claimed to establish a space in which to act, whether it be for prayer or protest, for mourning a nation's loss or growing a nation's

defense.

Among other nations, the United States harnessed the act of gardening as a political tool to fight the fight on the home front during the First and Second World Wars. Through the establishment of the National War Garden Commission in 1917, initiated by conservationist Charles Lathrop Pack, the U.S. ran a propaganda campaign promoting the war effort at home by recasting the front yard as a home front. Suddenly, joining the “land army” or the “garden army” as a proud “soldier of war” meant digging up the ground for vegetable gardens. And while growing food does not quite equate to growing flowers, the shared notion of gardening as a continuous action, which is always renewing itself in the process of producing ephemera, places similar emphasis on temporary benefits rather than lasting products. In this way, tending to war gardens—at least the larger community plots—encouraged civic engagement as much as temporary war shrines, albeit somewhat less voluntarily.

In mobilizing Americans to grow the nation’s food supply, propaganda posters and pamphlets cultivated morale and support for the war abroad. One of the earliest posters exploits the growing metaphor: it urges citizens to “Sow the Seeds of Victory!” under the banner “Every Garden a Munition Plant” and is signed by Charles Lathrop Pack, the president of the commission himself (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); (Pic. 2). In publicizing the war gardens, later known as “victory gardens,” Pack emphasized the community aspect of gardening by drawing a parallel to the comradeship of soldiers at war. His booklet, *The War Garden Victorious*, published in 1919, the same year the term “home front” emerged, calls on civilians to garden in the name of duty, beauty, civic pride, unity, and democracy. It clearly states: “Unity of thought, of action, of ideals, is the crying need of the hour in America... Probably nothing is more potent as a factor for building up community spirit than gardening, particularly community gardening.” (Pack, 1919:96); (Pic. 3) Pack advanced the idea that community gardening was a way of “putting ‘slacker lands’ to work,” (Idem: 79) which is to say that gardening became glorified as a civic duty. And what better way to mobilize a populace than through public display? In this way, the front yard would quickly become the grounds for “develop[ing] civic pride and community spirit.” (Idem: 96).

The patriotic banner spanned the nation, the state, the home, and the garden—no ground was left untouched. This thoroughness is precisely what the home front came to signify: a private response to a public call. And while in this case the new front’s proximity may not have led directly to a public expression of anxiety—perhaps rather the opposite, raising morale and support for the ongoing war effort—it still served as a communal way of engaging with the war on domestic territory on two levels. At a national scale, individuals working their own private yards for the greater



Pic 2: “Sow the seeds of Victory!” U.S. propaganda poster. Source: Author unknown or not provided (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), U.S. Food Administration. Educational Division. Advertising Section. (1919/01 - 1918/15/01), [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, Still Picture Records Section, Special Media Archives Division (NWCS-S), url: [Archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov).

good drove the collective war effort, and on an interpersonal level, community garden plots themselves encouraged a personal, hands-on community spirit—or so Pack’s booklet claims:

“Our soldiers, shoulder to shoulder in the trenches, learned, that, whatever their respective stations in life, they are brothers. In a heat a little less intense, but none the less sufficient to weld the strongest souls, our gardeners, too, have fused into a solid unit. Link by link the chain of our democracy has grown stronger (Idem: 97).”

Using both the material and the metaphor of a garden, the



Pic 3: "Secretary Plowing Boston Common 4/11/44. Victory Garden Program," April 1944, 11.
Source: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Public Domain Photographs, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), NAI 195586.

movement recruited a civilian labor force into a perhaps pseudo-militaristic, patriotic one. As Pack recognized, a shared and physical task not only achieves comradeship by bringing individuals together in public spaces, but in the case of WWI and WWII community war gardens, it also reintroduced many city dwellers to the life cycle of plants. Gardening may build community or grow democracy, but it also acts as a tangible reminder of the preciousness of individual lives.

Flowers and Flags: Protesting the Vietnam War

Both the war shrine movement and the war garden movement—as movements, which generally “emerge” for a particular purpose and time—occupied non-static space. It suddenly becomes clear that landscape ephemera carries a double meaning: Spring ephemerals, those beloved, seasonal details in the environment plucked or purchased as floral tributes to the fallen may be named for the brevity of their lives, but ephemeral landscapes are characterized by equally

short-lived events. Both movements sprung up on public ground, one to mourn and one to support the war. But landscape ephemera has played at least a third significant role in war landscapes: Flowers made a comeback in the opposition movement to the Vietnam War, further evolving their direct association with the civilian experience of war by establishing their status as symbols of peace, and of life over death. As such, measured strictly in relation to flowers and gardens, one could say that the twentieth-century civilian experience of war followed a trajectory that grew from being passive (laying flowers in mourning) to complacent (war-gardening in solidarity) to active (placing flowers in military police rifle barrels in protest); (Pic. 4).

The slogan “flower power” described a much more politically charged attitude than either the war shrine or the war garden movement. The iconic anti-war movement adopted flowers to capture an ideology based on passive resistance and non-violence. With the help of others, the American political and social activist Abbie Hoffman spearheaded the movement.



Pic 4: "Photograph of a Female Demonstrator Offering a Flower to a Military Police Officer" (October 1967 ,21). Source: Department of Defense [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons. National Archives and Records Administration, NAI 594360.

And before the American beat poet Allen Ginsberg coined the term "flower power," Hoffman, together with radical Jim Fouratt, was the first to call on flowers as an icon for their movement. In *Abbie Hoffman: American Rebel*, Marty Jezer describes how Hoffman and Fouratt decided "the movement should convey a positive message and not be viewed as being against patriotic sentiments. Looking for an image that would convey something positive, they decided to organize a Flower Brigade and, under the banner of supporting the boys, join the parade." (Jezer & Hoffman, 1992: 104). The parade they joined was the Support Our Boys parade organized by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, which took place as a follow-up parade to the poorly attended Loyalty Parade held in New York City on April 29, 1967. The protesters marched waving cut flowers like flags—a not altogether unfamiliar coupling given the ceremonial memorial traditions.

It seems impossible that flowers could have become such a powerful tool for political activism. At the same time, it seems plausible that the very same qualities of a flower—its intimate scale, its ephemerality, its individuality and sincerity—which marked it as an appropriate offering in wartime Britain among other places, could also lead to a disarming offense to the U.S. military. When undercover agents discovered the protester's plan to airdrop 10,000 flowers on the Pentagon in 1967, Hoffman published a

statement in *WIN* (Workshop in Nonviolence) magazine with nearly the same effect:

The Flower Brigade lost its first battle, but watch out America... We were poorly equipped with flowers from uptown florists. Already there is talk of growing our own. Plans are being made to mine the East River with daffodils. Dandelion chains are being wrapped around induction centers. Holes are being dug in street pavements and seeds dropped and covered. The cry of 'Flower Power' echoes through the land. We shall not wilt. Let a thousand flowers bloom (*WIN* magazine, in Jezer, & Hoffmans, 1992:104).

A photograph taken by French photographer Marc Riboud at The Pentagon in Washington, D.C. during the March for Peace in Vietnam on October 21, spread the message of flower power even further. (Fig. 5) The recognizable shot captures the confrontation between a protester and a soldier in the meeting of a flower and a bayonet—two powerful symbols, no doubt. And in Hoffman's words, too, the symbolism is rich. Unlike the flowers laid on a memorial or grave, these flowers "shall not wilt." However, what Hoffman's message actually perpetuates is the specimen's ability to regenerate—its persistence to bloom. As is commonly misunderstood, though considered "short-lived," ephemerals do not die; they go dormant. In either case, Hoffman and Fouratt chose an icon, which granted the people an identity. Whether those in



Pic 5: Seventeen-year-old Jan Rose Kasimir holding a chrysanthemum up to bayonet-wielding soldiers at march on The Pentagon, October 1967, 21. Source: Image rights courtesy of the author. © Marc Riboud (photographer).

opposition to the Vietnam War protested because of the draft or for moral reasons (the innumerable civilian casualties in Vietnam), flower power grew to mean more than non-violence: it marks another significant instance in which civilians expressed their individual, emotional, moral, and personal power. A continuous bloom signifies the enduring spirit of a politicized and empowered society.

The Universal Front: Facing Political Violence and Global Unrest

The laying of flowers is first a personal, then a civil and lastly a political act; on the home front, a floral tribute may comfort the bereaved, a garden feed the war effort, a daffodil act as symbol of peace. A flower is a familiar weapon, wielded toward any purpose and especially potent in times of war when we most poignantly feel our own mortality reflected in its ephemerality. Seen together, the war shrine-, war garden-, and flower power movements reveal how time and again landscape ephemera have served as tools for public expression and engagement on multiple fronts. If the twentieth century was marked by a receding military front and an emerging and ever-present home front, then the twenty-first century—at least in the Western world—beginning with the New York World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, has been marked by what we may call the advent of the ‘universal front.’ WWI’s “total” warfare first blurred the boundary between combatants and non-combatants; WWII introduced a pervasive awareness of

the nuclear threat; a century later, the ongoing political violence and unprecedented rate of massive attacks in highly urbanized areas today, is generating a front that appears to be simultaneously nowhere and everywhere. This counterintuitive, perhaps even hypocritical, trend for war to become both less tangible and ever more present also saw a resurgence of spontaneous, national display of grief.

As if in memory of the old traditions, contemporary makeshift memorials recurrently feature these same articles: unofficial “rolls of honour,” notes, candles, flags and flowers. What distinguishes the contemporary sites for mourning, such as the street shrines in front of the Petit Cambodge and Le Carillon and the Bataclan in Paris following the attacks on November 13, 2015, from their antecedents is the multiplicity they serve: sites of violence, sites of mourning, and sites of continued risk and fear. On November 15, CNN released video footage of mourners fleeing the scene (former “war zone”) again after fireworks were heard nearby and misinterpreted as further shots (Pic. 6). Indeed, recent risk maps show public spaces as some of the most dangerous locations worldwide—subsequently also displacing the mourners of their rights to the sites, when public grieving is precisely what the people are expressing. As long as the future of the universal front remains unclear, it is hardly possible to conceive of a more pressing issue for landscape architects to address in the twenty-first century than protecting public space.



Pic: 6: Street memorial at Le Carillon, rue Bichat and rue Alibert, November 2015 ,16.

Source: Jean François Gornet (photographer).

Conclusion | Confronting with new universal front in 21st century, we are due for another movement in memorial design; permanent memorial structures cannot be erected fast enough. The resurgent trend for local communities to enshrine the war dead, more precisely the victims of present-day attacks, is a call for landscape ephemera in times of war. One thing is clear: a memorial should not only be for the people but also by the people. As was evident in WWI, the offerings not only honored the soldiers but also served the shrines' caretakers: "These [shrines] could also to some degree be 'tended' by mourners through frequent visits to renew their floral tributes." (King, 1998: 60). The image of mourners "tending" a shrine as a gardener would a garden is a useful one

for rethinking memorial design. In this way, a contemporary war memorial might resemble more of an urban flower garden than a sculptural monument: a central, public space reserved for an active and shared mourning, a space that can serve community-building and display the power of the people. Similar to a classic cutting garden, understood as a vegetable plot for flowers, this plot would invite local mourners to work through their grief at the intimate scale of a garden. Blooming and withering plant material might fill the space, recalling the flower fields at the great shrine in Hyde Park and answering to flower power's cry for an eternal bloom: "We shall not wilt. Let a thousand flowers bloom."

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