

## *Custodianship of the Earth*

A conversation between Robert Harrison, professor of French and Italian literature, and the landscape architect Thomas Woltz<sup>1</sup>

---

*In the midst of the inferno we've created on this planet, Thomas Woltz seeks vestiges of the Eden our earth could re-become if only we could reimagine how to go about inhabiting it. That reimagining begins with the reconfiguring of our environments. In its higher vocation, landscape architecture does precisely that. It seeks to heal the wound that history has inflicted on this little threshing floor that makes us so fierce, as Dante calls our planet when he looks back at it from the heaven of the fixed stars.*

**ROBERT HARRISON:** I'm joined today by one of America's leading landscape architects, Thomas Woltz, who has a way of turning vision into reality at various sites around the world. Thomas Woltz is the principal and owner of the firm Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, which has undertaken many remarkable projects, projects that give someone like me the unlikely hope that maybe, just maybe, we might be on the brink of a better earth, to borrow a phrase from Samuel Beckett, who gave us some of the bleakest landscapes in modern literature and whom no one can accuse of being a sappy optimist. In the midst of the inferno we've created on this planet, my guest seeks vestiges of the Eden our earth could re-become if only we could reimagine how to go about inhabiting it. That reimagining begins with the reconfiguring of our environments. In its higher vocation, landscape architecture does precisely that. It seeks to heal the wound that history has inflicted on this little threshing floor that makes us so fierce, as Dante calls our planet when he looks back at it from the heaven of the fixed stars. It's going to take, no doubt, a lot of Thomas Woltzes working all around the globe to refound our landscapes, our cities, our wild and domestic spaces, our battered psyches, and much else besides. But if Woltz and other like-minded practitioners of

---

<sup>1</sup> Aired on *Entitled Opinions (about Life and Literature)* on November 18, 2021. Edited for print.

landscape design and restoration manage to prevail, our planet just may slowly, laboriously, and improbably re-imparadise itself, both locally and globally, thanks to their vocation of care. Thomas Woltz, you're known for integrating a variety of disciplines in your work—art, architecture, agriculture, ecological and cultural reclamation, among others. You've received a number of awards and honors over the years. You were named designer-innovator of the year by the *Wall Street Journal* magazine in 2013 and “one of the most creative people in business,” by *Fast Company* in 2017. In 2019, the Trust for Public Land honored you as their person of the year. And in your acceptance speech on that occasion, you declared that landscape design is a kind of caretaking of the earth. By that, you meant not only the soil, minerals, and bacteria of the earth, but also the cultural histories of the geographical sites you work with. You spoke of, in fact, “a moral mandate to look carefully and deeply at the cultural record held silently in the land.” So can I ask you to start off with this? How do you understand the vocation of care that defines landscape architecture and your view of it?

**WOLTZ:** I find that landscape architecture can be best defined through analogies of textiles. In fact, it is an art of weaving, of embroidery, of warp and weft. And I find that the grain of the ecological context in which we find ourselves is engaged and enmeshed with the cultural responses of civilization. I think, for me, imagining the role of landscape architecture, I go back to your essay in *Gardens: Essays on the Human Condition*, and the chapter on the vocation of care. It came to mind when making the comments for the Trust for Public Land as a way to really think about our role as landscape architects. Two of the origin narratives that you included in that chapter brought keenly to mind how I would define our job. And yes, I believe our job has a moral mandate, a moral mandate of stewardship of both culture and ecology. But the two origin stories that I am referring to are, one, Odysseus on Calypso's island. He is offered eternal life, offered paradise, offered a life of no labor, no worries. And all he does is long for home and for the *vita activa* that you outlined. He wants to be in a world that makes a difference. And, yes, that means he will die. That means he will deal with the mortal coil and its terminus, but he will have engaged in the world around him. And he longs for that engagement, that degree of entanglement in the cares of life.

You also, in that chapter, outline the Eden origin story of Adam and Eve who only understand that they have been given everything in paradise the moment it is lost. And I feel that the climate crisis we face globally has made very clear that we have lost the paradise that we were given. When you combine these two, the urge to Hannah Arendt's *vita activa*, the engagement of life with the cause of this realization that we have, in fact, abandoned the paradise that we were given in this miraculous planet, that is a call to arms, and with it comes the moral mandate to tell the truth in the land. That's what I aspire to do. And that's what I hope many people will discover in the profession of landscape architecture and join this exciting, challenging, difficult work to try to re-weave some of the tears in the tapestry.

**HARRISON:** Well, then, let me ask, in case some of our listeners will assume over-hastily that your whole vision of that vocation is predicated upon some sort of subscribing to an origin story that comes from the scriptures or comes from mythology, and that there was a paradise that was originally given to us by God and that therefore landscape architects are somehow doing the work of God—I have a feeling that you don't mean that.

**WOLTZ:** Not at all.

**HARRISON:** I think that we don't know what does the giving. As Heidegger says, "it gives," it's given, but there is no substantive noun behind the giving. It's just that it has been a given that our planet was, in many ways, as you say, a kind of earthly paradise with all of its perils and so forth. So I want to give you a chance to respond to that.

**WOLTZ:** I subscribe to no particular origin myth. But there are these constructs throughout literature and religion and philosophy that continue to resonate with people as almost literary structures that we cling to. So as a way to enter this conversation about this idea of stewardship of the miracle that surrounds us, whatever its origin may or may not be, I feel that in this moment in time, our duty is to work very hard for its care and stewardship, right?

**HARRISON:** So the idea of a loss of Eden can also [stand] metaphorically for the work of restoration. How much of your profession and practice, as a landscape designer, are actually involved in retrieving, reclaiming, restoring vestiges of things that were present at a site, and that maybe are still somehow hanging on? So it is a work of going back and revivifying things in large part.

**WOLTZ:** It can be. We have, on staff, restoration ecologists and conservation biologists. But we are not an ecological restoration firm. We are a design practice. Just to situate that work in the context of Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, about 60 percent of our work is public landscapes, public parks. Often those are very urban places. Maybe 20 percent of our work is conservation agriculture where we go into badly, badly damaged, large-scale land holdings of productive agriculture, reorganize the agriculture to be more regenerative and sustainable practices while reweaving the broken or disrupted connectivity for wildlife, soil, biome, water quality, biodiversity within these productive landscapes. The remaining percentage are cultural institutions like university campuses, museums, places that engage people in the narratives of remarkable cultural contexts. So within that scope, yes, we do restoration ecology, but I don't aspire to some Edenic perfection, some original stasis. I think celebrating the scar of damage, revealing the scars of what we have done to the land, becomes a cautionary tale. It's also the opportunity for artful design responses that acknowledge what has happened in agricultural and urban settings and bring back what we can in a high-functioning biodiverse and beautiful way, but using design as the moderator of that discourse, not pretending it's a paradise again.

**HARRISON:** I gather that when you go to a site, you are not trying to efface all the scars that history has inflicted, you are actually, in a certain sense, respectful of them and want to create a cultural memory of what has happened there even in its destructiveness. And in that sense, it's not just natural restoration, but it's also a kind of... I understand it as an operation of cultural memory as much as natural reconfiguration.

**WOLTZ:** I appreciate that read on it. And I would say it is the weave of the two. In fact, our design process, that we apply to the full range of projects from the quarter-acre pocket park to a 10,000-acre reclamation of mining land—these are highly designed landscapes, but they all grow from a specific process. I'll just quickly outline that to illustrate this kind of unusual land stewardship that celebrates scars rather than effacing them. We'll start with a deep look at the ecosystems that shaped a piece of land. Sometimes that's from the retreat of the last ice age. It's the geology that formed, the drying up of the pan-craton sea, where the stone actually came from and how it was formed, how plant communities developed and thrived. So we might be looking back tens of thousands of years in the ecological history of this site.

Parallel to that, we're looking for the cultural traces where humans were often drawn to a place by some ecological phenomenon, like falling water leads to towns built along fall lines that have mills in manufacturing, mineral deposits that lead to the founding of cities that start to quarry these minerals. And humans change or alter that ecosystem, that ecological nugget that drew them—rich soils, for example, in agriculture. That ecosystem changes those people. They in turn change it again. And there begins this incredible dance between culture and ecology. So this research-based design philosophy that I'm so engaged in and so riveted by is one where we try to uncover the dance steps of this back and forth, and, in that, find the spark of design ideas of what this landscape will be. Rather than having an idea of a pattern or a form that we want to impose on the land, we're listening deeply and carefully to the land to look for its cues and clues of what we will design in response to the brief.

**HARRISON:** I think that's what I respond to most in your work, as I see it, which is the bringing out of latent presences in a site rather than imposing upon it some kind of design. But maybe we could talk about a few specifics and projects. I know that you've done the Aga Khan Garden at the University of Alberta Botanic Garden. If that's a particular instance, you think, that would be fruitful to begin with, or maybe you have another project that you would like to start with?

**WOLTZ:** I'm happy to talk about the work with His Highness, the Aga Khan. He is the imam of the Ismaili people, the religious leader of the Ismaili, and has been a remarkable client for over a decade now with multiple projects: the Aga Khan Garden in Alberta, the Aga Khan Center in London at King's Cross, and now the Ismaili Cultural Center in Houston, Texas. The project in Alberta was an extraordinary experience because His Highness, when he engaged us, said he hoped that this landscape would answer a question. And that is that the tradition of the Islamic garden had outlined very specifically what the garden of paradise would be. He said, "I'm interested in what

a twenty-first-century interpretation of that garden might become. What would that garden look like? What would it be about?" So in order to discover an answer, His Highness said we had one year to think. And in order to understand the deep history of the Islamic garden, he sent me to Africa and India. Unfortunately, my travels to Afghanistan and Pakistan were canceled due to the political situation. But in looking at these ancient gardens, he wanted me to, with my body, read temperature, smells, fragrance, stones, scale, and really metabolize this history in order to answer the question for the twenty-first century.

One of the things that we were struck by was that the most ancient ruined gardens were actually the calibration of water in arid climates. And so the garden of paradise, we proposed, came from the gardens that were means of survival in these climates and then were stylized to be gardens of pleasure. So we thought in the twenty-first century in Alberta, one of the great ecological challenges is the oil sands exploration. In the legally mandated remediation of those sites, the native seeds are not available in appropriate quantity. This twelve-acre garden in Edmonton is hosted by the University of Alberta and the Department of Life Sciences in the Environment. It has formal and informal gardens, all carefully calibrated with water. We proposed that a portion of these gardens would be dedicated to the cultivation of these rare native seeds that could represent the sort of positive radiating influence of this garden into its region to start to rebuild those broken ecologies. The cultivation of the garden is engaged in the remediation of this environmental disaster that's within the region. And so the garden of paradise became re-envisioned through its roots as a garden of productive landscapes. Still, physically, it has the geometry one would expect. But what's being grown there is something that gives back to the world.

**HARRISON:** You know, that brings to mind Dante. I keep going back to that guy, for some reason. But in purgatory, when he gets to the garden of Eden he meets Matilda, who's not a guardian, but she's a resident spirit there. And she explains to him that all the plant life on earth has identical origins because all of the seeds have been blown from the top, you know, the Garden of Eden is at the top of the mountain of purgatory. And given the rotation of the heavenly spheres, you have this constant breeze. It's not meteorological, it's just cosmic rotation. That breeze scatters the seeds from Eden and sends them down the mountain, and all the plant life on earth therefore has this kind of origin. So it sounds to me like what you did there in the University of Alberta Botanic Garden has some kind of reference to that re-identifying, not identifying, re-identifying the actual source of plant life on earth. Anyway, enough of that. That was a brilliant reconstruction. Thank you for explaining that so clearly.

There is a very important project you're engaged in in New Zealand, which really has challenged the multidisciplinary that you bring to bear. I spoke about art, architecture, agriculture, and all that. And this is a very big project. It's not, by any means, modest. Can you explain what the Orongo Station Conservation master plan is all about?

**WOLTZ:** Yes, I can. We began that project twenty years ago. It was my first trip to New Zealand. And upon arrival to this 3,000-acre sheep and cattle station coastal property,

my immediate questions were not so much to the regional farmers, but to the Maori elders. The Ngai Tamanuhiri is the tribe that occupies this eastern shore of the North Island. And the property has a remarkable parallel cultural history in that the Horouta Canoe from the great migration of Southeast Asia of the Maori people, around 1300, landed at the site. And it is also the first land cited by Nicholas Young, who is the cabin boy for Captain James Cook on the ship the *Endeavor* in 1769.

This one piece of land is the origin point of Eastern and Western civilization coming to this landmass that was the largest landmass on the planet uninhabited by mammals. So it's kind of a remarkable origin story there. Meeting with the Maori elders, I realized that they outlined a vision for the living earth that was much more in alignment with my own personal views than those of the European farmers in the region. The idea of a property line is like a line drawn in pencil that can be moved or erased, but the body of the earth is continuous beneath those lines. And that's how as landscape architects, in our profession, we must see the land. Where does the water come from? Where does it go? What is our role of stewardship of animals, plants, water, sun, light, air, as they move through our work and on to other parts of the world? And that idea—that the entire body of earth with humans woven into it is one living system—is very much how I see the world.

So it was a real honor to be accepted by this community. And they were very generous in responding to our many questions over time. We would walk the site and their archaeologist, Noel Pohatu, who lived within the community would start to tell me how his ancestors had used the land, buried the dead, cultivated the ground, fishing, weaving, using flax to make decorations within their houses. So we learned a lot about the Maori traditions of the land. And we then, working with conservation biologists, wetland specialists, started to try to rebuild this infrastructure, this massive working landscape to reconstruct, as works of art, the wetlands, forests, and bring back very endangered wildlife to the site. That yielded some of the large construction projects that I think you've seen, like the seventy-five-acre wetland, where previous owners had drained all of the wetlands into the Pacific Ocean to maximize grazing land, which is a common practice in New Zealand for farmers.

And we thought: rather than just dam it up and let it refill, let's excavate it to increase the hydrologic diversity, the plant diversity, by creating islands and rivers and deep and shallow channels. But let's design it as a living painting: in the dry season, new land forms emerge; in the wet season, they disappear. So it's a kind of throbbing, pulsing, living laboratory of birds and plants and soil biology in this massive constructed wetland. I think its artificiality is quite important. If something is breached or erodes, you fix it, you see it. It's quite evident. It's not pretending to be natural, but it's a very carefully calibrated system in service to the increased biodiversity. The farmers managing the livestock say they've seen improved health in the animals thanks to the increased biodiversity that they're seeing. We've planted 600,000 rainforest tree species on the site. It's a temperate rainforest, naturally, this ecosystem. So it's an example of balancing the productive landscape and the ecological landscape while allowing greater visibility to the Maori cultural traces that shape the land. So this is

where analogies of weaving and embroidery and tapestry come to mind when I try to describe our role as landscape architects.

**HARRISON:** Karel Capek, the Czech author of “Gardener’s Year,” says that the gardener wants five hundred years to see what the results of his or her labor into making the garden will yield. The gardener is one of the few people these days who thinks in that kind of long term beyond the threshold of one’s death. And that is getting rarer and rarer to find people who can actually, willfully throw themselves into projects whose full fruition will not come about in their own lifetime.

**WOLTZ:** It’s strange, perhaps, but I find real calm and solace in that idea that what you’re laboring intensely on for the land might have this kind of longevity. I know that the projects in which I am most deeply engaged today will not have achieved the vision until long after my death. And rather than feeling anxious about it, it brings me a deep state of calm.

**HARRISON:** I can understand that because one of the things that we suffer from, many without realizing, is the kind of shrinkage of our temporal horizons so that the temporal depth that we used to take for granted, like we once took Eden for granted, the idea that the human present has deep roots in the past, the past that we were not even conscious of, and is always projected into a future, you know, beyond our lifetimes. . . . This is the way in which we inhabited time as a kind of ocean of potentiality. And for one reason or another, that horizon is shrinking to a kind of present, just punctual experience of the punctual nature of time as in this point, right here and right now. I was reading (Robert) Macfarlane, he has an essay in *The New York Review* of books about wayfinding, how did we find our way, and the way that the GPS technology now has put in everyone’s pocket a kind of thing where you are this pulsing blue dot on a screen. And so you’re walking through your environment with your head down, looking at the screen and not in the world anymore. And it’s just that you are here and everything is oriented around you. Whereas the way of being in the world for all the previous generations was always being outside yourself, and looking and trying to find your way in a much larger horizon that surrounds us. So it’s just what we call environment. That’s what environment means, it’s which surrounds us.

**WOLTZ:** I just want to add one brief comment to that, that even when we set our horizon beyond the power of our individual vision, when our horizon is that far off ocean, there can be for some of us, within this cultural moment, an urgency to row your rowboat very hard and fast because there is urgency in working for these long term goals to come to fruition. And one of the things that comes to mind is the power of erasure in the landscape that has happened through intent and will of people to erase the difficult, the painful, the dark stories that our landscape does hold. I’m thinking, in particular, of the history of the Native American people of this continent, the enslavement of Africans in this continent, and how uncomfortable those stories are and how fragile

and easily erased they are in the landscape. So I feel a great sense of urgency to bring those stories back to the fore through our work. And that's part of this interrogation of the ecosystem, the ecology and culture that shape a piece of land. When you can find those stories and bring an authentic kind of mnemonic device through design to offer a place to revisit and honor those stories, I think that's how we begin to heal—when we can tell the truth in the land.

**HARRISON:** Yes. And I hate to keep having these associations that aren't directly related, but what you described evokes for me the Greek word *physis*, which is usually translated as nature, but *physis* is a word that really means a process of emerging into presence. You bring something from out of concealment into a realm where it becomes present. Maybe primitively present, maybe fully present, and your practice sounds like you do that, that you're helping what may remain latent and hidden to come fuller into a kind of view—not necessarily a visual view, but even experiential, some other kind of sensory sort of access to it.

**WOLTZ:** And to achieve this, our research process is essential. I can't extol the virtues of that enough because that is where you find the authentic fragment, the authentic remain. An example is Centennial Park in Nashville, Tennessee, where we did a master plan for the park and then began construction on different phases that are ongoing for the past ten years. One of them was the Cockrill Spring. We had heard that this early pioneer woman, the first woman to own land, free and clear, title and deed, west of the Appalachian Mountains in colonial America had also started the first school in Nashville. Her brother was the founder of Nashville. She had a farm, and her private farm was what was now Centennial Park. And so we looked at records of cholera mapping where rivers and streams were put into tunnels to prevent cholera from spreading through the city.

Through a lot of research, we found where we thought her spring might have been. And we began excavation. We discovered the spring that had been buried in 1870 and brought it to daylight on the site that travelers had written about for generations: "I knew I was home to Nashville when I tasted the fresh cool waters of Cockrill Spring." We thought, where the hell is Cockrill Spring? We've got to find this thing. We daylighted it. And now it's a fountain, a very contemporary plaza with 110 gallons a minute of fresh water surging up into the park, which we now capture. And it irrigates the park. So it's offsetting millions of gallons of drinking water that were used for irrigation. So this cultural research led to an authentic design response, designing a moment that you can plunge your hands in that cold water, and you're holding hands with thousands of years of history. But then it becomes a sustainability solution for the management of a public landscape by capturing that water. And it was all just because we got curious about the hidden stories in land.

**HARRISON:** Amazing. It gives this concrete element to the Heideggerian heavy, portentous lexicon of the unconcealment of being. That process of unconcealment is what



you're describing in many ways. And it doesn't end with just the unconcealment. Then there is the care for its, not perpetuity, but its endurance in the future.

**WOLTZ:** Well, that care is probably one of the most difficult challenges I face for the work of our practice: people not really understanding the degree of engagement, of maintaining and sustaining, these landscapes require. We are so separated from our understanding of how nature actually works that over and over, we see people build something, and everyone's very happy at the opening, and you go back a year or two later, and it's appalling the lack of care and maintenance. And so we're trying to, with any of our public parks, plead that the conservancies, the parks department, as they raise funds to build these projects, set aside 20 percent of the construction cost for a maintenance endowment. Because without this ongoing care and stewardship, it will fall apart. It succumbs to invasive plant pressures or abuse. So it's not just caring for the world, it's caring to maintain the world.

**HARRISON:** You know that I can't stress how much I agree and sympathize with that because here we are in Silicon Valley. You're not a native of Silicon Valley, you're just here visiting and we're recording the show. But Silicon Valley, all of its premiums go to innovation. And there is no sense of the value of maintenance and how much maintenance is so much more fundamental than innovation. And I experienced this even in the university, where I belong to a sector of the humanities. And then there are the sciences and a lot of things taking place in a university like Stanford and the sexy thing I have to do with innovation, biotechnology, and medical things. What are the humanities? It's mostly about maintenance, about teaching students what your forefathers knew before, and this sort of maintaining a certain level of knowledge about things. Yet when everything now is geared towards the model of innovation and experimentation and avant garde, then I think of what you described about going to a place two years later and it's all in ruins because no one is doing that un-sexy work of maintaining. All this leads me to a kind of proposition, "no restoration without maintenance." Because you can restore and if it's not maintained, it's not going to go anywhere. One last project I'd like to talk with you about briefly, coming to the end of the show, is a Memorial Park in Houston, Texas, which I've written about for the *Harvard Design Magazine*, as you know. Because it was really something that impressed me greatly where you have a park in the center of Houston, a huge park, and it's called the Memorial Park. Most people don't know really anything about what it is memorializing, what the history, what the cultural memory associated with it is. And maybe you could share with our listeners what you're envisioning to do there that will bring out of its concealment the memorial history of this site.

**WOLTZ:** I'm glad you asked about Memorial Park because, in a way, it can summarize the arc of our practice and the arc of this conversation in the sense that I feel like we've hit a stride where this process of bringing visibility to the deep history of the site was very useful in building support of the public community. We met with over

three thousand Houstonians to get their feedback and ideas about this park, which is 1,600 acres in the middle of Houston, right between downtown and uptown Houston. It was historically Native American hunting grounds. Through doing deep soil tests, we found margins of ash where we could tell that the Karankawa native peoples had been burning this site to attract bison. It's on the Buffalo Bayou River. So we start with the Native American history. Then the early settlers history, it was a timber operation. It was the site of brick kilns. There was a grazing operation, a fruit tree production. Later, it was acquired to be a training camp for soldiers going to war in Europe and World War I. This site totals more than 1,500 acres of training camp including grounds for the cavalry. And so you have this ephemeral city of 30,000 soldiers being trained. At the end of World War I, the Hogg family, who had discovered oil at Spindletop, suddenly a very wealthy family, acquired the land and did a sale to the city over a long period of time so that the city could create this park. And it was the Hogg family's intention that it be called Memorial Park to remember the sacrifice of these soldiers.

Well, fast forward to the droughts of a few years ago. Houston received essentially no rain for four or five years. This forested park that had never really received or implemented a master plan had grown up as a forest dramatically populated by invasive exotic species. It suffered tremendously in the drought—80 percent of the forest canopy died in those four years. So that was when there was a call for landscape architects to interview, and we were very fortunate to be selected. We began this process that I've described of looking at what were the authentic, resilient, ancient ecosystems of the Gulf Coast, of Texas, that survived for thousands of years before we were here. That's wet prairie, dry prairie, mixed hardwood forest, and pine forest. And so we said, rather than the idealized English park aesthetic popular in Houston, let's do an authentic Texan ecology as we rebuild, because drought will come again to Houston and floods, as we've already seen, will come again to Houston. So we need to invest in the most resilient and authentic ecosystems while telling the story of the soldiers of the war. We've been working on that part for about eight years.

We're very fortunate that the power of these design ideas and stories attracted funding from the private sector. And the Memorial Park Conservancy does an extraordinary job of maintenance. They are building the maintenance budget, adding to the maintenance staff. We completed the first section of the new park a year ago. During COVID, it quietly opened. They just removed the construction barriers. But people immediately knew how to use it. It's called the Eastern Glade. It has the latent sense of a drill ground, and it honors the original axial entry to Camp Logan, the training camp. But it offers a massive elliptical lawn for passive recreation, preserving lots of post oak and creating a kind of savannah, and then boardwalks weave through surrounding forested wetlands. So it's a very big, formal gesture, yet you're immersed in the natural ecologies of the park. The current construction project is about seventy acres of a land bridge that crosses six lanes of a highway. So again, the scar (that was just for your listeners), a six-lane highway was slashed through the park dividing the northern and southern halves in the fifties or sixties. And we had this idea of re-stitching the park together using a massive land bridge. Four tunnels span the road and because of the high water table, we couldn't excavate down. So the road remains at surface and we did

a high-performance precast concrete tunnel shell, and then sixty or seventy acres of earth ramps slowly up, over, and back down, using dry and wet prairie as the ecosystem to sustain it—so hundreds of trees are being planted.

And in my mind, the scar is there. You see the highway, but you've made this giant artful gesture with huge, elliptical entry portals into the tunnel. The geometries are very carefully calibrated. It's not trying to look natural, it's a massive work of earth art. But what it represents is the triumph of the landscape over the gray infrastructure of the city, and it allows both to survive. A little bit like Hudson Yards, the trains continue to function and have a public plaza above. So I'm really interested, moving forward, in these hybrid ecosystems where we don't say, well, that's lost, but what can we invent as a new landscape hybrid?

**HARRISON:** Can you say something about the planting of the loblolly pines? Really explicitly, it's a radical idea of planting and then cutting down.

**WOLTZ:** Yes. I think it is a radical idea. We developed it in the master plan and we are just about to begin design development on that part of the park. But what you're referring to is an area where, working with local archeologists, they brought to our attention the remains of some very modest structures from the Camp Logan era. They're the foundations of latrine buildings and shower buildings for the soldiers. Because, remember, everything else was ephemeral. It was a canvas city of tens of thousands of people. So these are authentic fragments, no matter how modest. And that is, as I said before, that moment that you hold hands with history when you can touch the authentic. I think those are very important devices in the landscape. The idea that our team proposed was to plant one hundred acres of loblolly pines, fifteen feet on center in both directions, which is a fairly standard distance for Texas forestry. Loblolly pines are a major staple of the forestry industry. Every day, we use paper, cardboard, you don't even think about it. So bringing that to one's consciousness is, I think, a good step.

But also, the formation of these forests, they look like long cathedrals or, if you will, soldiers marching in formation. It was while looking at some old black-and-white photographs of the drill yard with all these soldiers that we thought, gosh, this really resembles a plantation of trees. Maybe that is an appropriate memorial. And it makes for these really spectacular long gallery spaces, but the sort of crux of the memorial concept is a brutal one and one that I think I'm often called out about and had to defend over and over. But here's the idea, that once we plant, which should be in the next two years, twenty-five years is the average age of maturity for loblolly pine in the Gulf Coast timber industry. Twenty-five years turns out to be the average age of the soldiers killed in World War I, so an incredibly young average age for death from that war.

**HARRISON:** Not as much as Vietnam, I think it was nineteen. But anyway, yes, twenty-five is young.

**WOLTZ:** So twenty-five being the age of maturity of the trees and the average age of the soldiers felt like a kind of touchstone for us. And so the idea is that on Memorial

Day, one “regiment” of trees, one thousand loblolly pines, would be respectfully and ceremonially cut down, removed from the forest, treated, kiln dried, and then go into service to projects like Habitat for Humanity, public housing, that those trees would be sacrificed in service to public need, public safety, public well-being. And then on Armistice Day, in November, a thousand Houstonians would come and replant the grove that had been felled. Maybe every five years, one regiment would be cut then replanted. If you see this, you will never forget it. It will be gutting and horrific, and you might viscerally understand the scale of loss of life in that war. And also the idea of sacrifice. So this is a living landscape memorial. It would go on in perpetuity. It’s constantly being cut and replanted just as we are. A