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## A Language Analysis of the Guerrilla Gardening Movement

This paper is an analysis of the language surrounding the guerrilla gardening movement. There will be a thorough explanation of the guerrilla gardening movement, and a discussion of the relationship the movement has with eco-terrorism. From there a language analysis will be conducted. The analysis will consist of a description of the overarching framing used in the movement, and will then further delve into specific metaphors used. Finally, there will be a discussion of the purpose behind the use of such metaphors and the possible reasoning behind the use of the overarching frame among environmental groups.

What is Guerrilla Gardening? Guerrilla gardening is a global ecological movement. They focus on caring for neglected spaces and creating beauty where it is needed. The head of the organization can be found in London, though it is a global movement. Most of the networking comes from a blog: [www.guerrillagardening.org](http://www.guerrillagardening.org). Guerrilla gardening is about bringing awareness of ecological issues to communities, and about how easily neglect can be remedied. It is a movement uniting gardening enthusiasts and social activists, alike. Guerrilla gardeners focus on caring for neglected public space. Ideally, they would like to

see an increase of public space where gardeners can grow plants that are beautiful, functional, and/or tasty. The presence of plant life in urban areas is important to the group. They wish to demonstrate the positive impact plant life can have on communities. The guerrilla gardening community wants to emphasize humanity's place within nature. Cohabitation with plants and the environment is a key ideal. Working with the environment, not dominating it, is part of the practice within the movement. They aim to show these values to the wider community and to demonstrate the value of plant and human relationships to local governments that might be hindering cohabitation. Guerrilla gardeners tend to work wherever a natural presence is needed, regardless of whether it is permissible to plant where they do, or not. This means that sometimes they are working outside of the legal system. As an environmental group working outside of the legal system, that can put them at risk of association with eco-terrorism. However, when examined further it becomes much harder to link eco-terrorism and guerrilla gardening.

Eco-terrorism is a term that refers to violence committed in support of ecological and environmental causes. It mostly consists of property damage, and is often of a symbolic nature. In the U.S. it is considered eco-terrorism to cause more than \$10,000 dollars in damages, as well as to intentionally inflict personal harm. Eco-terrorism is a type of radical environmentalism that is related to deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and bioregionalism. Eco-terrorism is a debated term. Some believe it is used to dehumanize social activists and socio/political activism. Some even suggest that the term would be more appropriate to refer to the environmentally damaging activities by corporations.

Since some groups that are considered eco-terrorist only perpetuate violence against property and not humans, there is some question as to whether or not they can actually be considered “terrorist”. The United States definition of terrorism includes violence against property, calling it a form of sabotage. Sabotage that has an environmental basis is often called monkeywrenching or ecotage. To some degree, guerrilla gardening may be considered a movement within eco-terrorism. However, given the non-violent nature of the group, that association is questionable, along with the fact, that in many cases, gardening can hardly be called property damage. The relationship between the two becomes very sketchy and hard to define, so for the most part guerrilla gardening operates outside the definition of eco-terrorism.

Now that a clear definition of the guerrilla gardening movement has been provided, and thoroughly explained, it is time to begin the language analysis. First, a brief introduction to Lakoff’s description of framing - framing is how humans view the world around them. Framing is the use of an unconscious, structured thinking process. This is sometimes called a schema in psychology. Frames include: semantic roles, relationships between roles and relations to other frames (Lakoff, 71). Political ideologies are characterized by particular frames and use of ideological language will activate an ideological frame. Consistent use of particular ideological frames results in the language becoming a normal part in both the ideology, and within general language itself. Environmental frames are the typically unconscious conceptual structures that people have in their brain circuitry to understand environmental issues. Words themselves are not frames, but words can activate a frame or a system of frames in the mind. This makes

framing and establishing a frame a very powerful language tool. Successful social movements require the use of a coherent framing system.

The overarching frame of language used in guerrilla gardening is essentially that of guerrilla warfare. The environmental movement uses another, already established, frame to get the word out about their movement and ideals. What is interesting is that even though the guerrilla gardening movement's actions have a positive effect on the environment, the frame that they use is generally associated with a negative state of affairs. That may potentially muddy the message of their movement. However, the guerrilla gardening movement capitalizes on the frame they use to create action within the movement. Perhaps it is better said that guerrilla gardening uses a frame which is parallel to that of guerrilla warfare. The reasoning behind why they would use such a frame is discussed further at a later point in this paper. Currently this paper will be delving into specific terms and metaphors within the frame. The aim here is to describe these terms and provide their purpose and prevalence in the movement.

### **“Guerrilla”**

Guerrilla is the first term that comes into play when regarding the war metaphor, since the movement itself is called “guerrilla gardening”. The use of guerrilla is to explain and emphasize the rogue nature of the movement. Guerrilla can also bring to mind an illusion of movement. It evokes the idea of a rogue battle that can break out in different parts of a region. Guerrilla warfare tactics can often be like an odd game of hide and seek, where neither party can truly find or see their opponent, but both sides feel the impact. This can be the same way in guerrilla gardening. With new gardens cropping up in the

middle of the night, the movement does reflect similar war tactics, but with an emphasis on non-violence.

The use of the term “guerrilla” is not exclusive to the guerrilla gardening movement. It has also been used in association with a solar movement. The guerrilla solar movement consists of solar advocates who are combatting the idea that people should pay for energy (Guevara-Stone, 1).

### **“War against neglect”**

The guerrilla gardening movement really focuses on rehabilitating neglected areas and adding functionality and beauty to where it was once lacking. The movement uses guerrilla gardening to make a statement. One example of this is from a woman in Upstate New York. She decided to make a statement on the neglect of the roadways by the city. She went in and planted pansies in the potholes. In an article posted by the Associated Press, Elaine Santore is quoted as saying “I wanted to make a statement about the problem and to make people smile after a horrible winter.” All ten of the potholes that Santore filled with flowers were soon fixed and topped over with blacktop (Shultz, 1).

### **“Illicit” cultivation**

The guerrilla gardening movement has no qualms over gardening in unconventional places. They will garden on both public and private lands. They truly focus on putting beauty where it is *needed*, regardless of whether or not it is *wanted* in a particular place. They also have a bit of a sub- slogan “gardening without boundaries”. This slogan actually

comes from a book, written by the founder of guerrillagardening.org, Richard Reynolds. His book is titled "On Guerrilla Gardening: a handbook on gardening without boundaries".

### **Join an existing "cell"**

This is the title for a tab on the main webpage, which will take you to an area that has links to Facebook pages, blogs and generally other ways to connect with people already into guerrilla gardening. This is their form of networking. Again this metaphor deeply taps into the warfare frame and evokes the idea of a terrorist cell, although this is a non-violent group. In reality, it is just a way to connect those who are new or interested in the movement, to those in their area, or to find other general resources for starting a new group. This is what helps connect the global community and allows it to actually be *global*. It's a friendly way to be united.

### **"Growing arsenal"**

This metaphor is actually used in reference to the site guerrillagardening.org, and refers even more specifically to the network that has come about as a result of the site. An arsenal is a collection of weapons, which makes it odd to refer to a site as a "growing arsenal". This can bring to question what exactly the weapon is. In this case, it appears to be referring to two things, people as weapons and awareness as a weapon. In guerrilla gardening, people can be considered a weapon because it is the members of the group who act as tools to implement change. The people are the ones who are going out and doing the planting. Awareness can also be considered a weapon here. The more awareness is spread, the more individuals will join guerrilla gardening, and the more positive change can be put into effect.

## **Seed “bombs” -- also called Seedboms**

Seed bombs are a compact mass of organic peat- free compost and seed. They are handmade from recycled, organic and biodegradable materials. There are a number of different varieties that come with different seed types in them. The types of seeds can vary from specific wildflower mixes, to sunflowers, or even strawberries. These seed bombs are the easy alternative to high maintenance gardening, as they can be easily put in medians and other neglected areas. All that is required for use is to soak them in water and throw them wherever there is sufficient soil and sunlight. They are sold online from the main guerrilla gardening page. They can be sold individually or in packs of six. There are also slingshots available for purchase.

There is one more fascinating point about these seed bombs. They are actually shaped like grenades. So in this area, not only is the warfare frame reinforced in a literary sense, but the frame transcends into a physical frame about the movement and their relationship with environmental activism gardening.

There is another physical metaphor that can be considered a part of guerrilla gardening. Moss graffiti is becoming more popular among the street art community. Moss graffiti, because it can be used like paint, is a very versatile medium. This means that it can be used to design slogans or images. It can be both a literary and physical metaphor. It is already used in limited amounts in the guerrilla gardening community, but it is not yet exceptionally prevalent. Despite being mostly in the street art community, a lot of the usage of moss graffiti has an ecological theme or message. Moss graffiti doesn't directly fit within the overarching warfare frame in guerrilla gardening, but it may technically fit

under the definition eco-terrorism, considering that vandalism is property damage. In that way, moss graffiti is relevant to guerrilla gardening.

### **Horticultural front line**

This is another metaphor used within the guerilla gardening community. This is used to describe how seriously the community views their job and impact on the wider world. The movement truly considers their cause to be a battle. It is a battle for awareness of ecological issues, it's a battle to beautify and repair neglected areas, it's a battle to unite a community, it's a battle to make change at a local level, and to create influence at a governmental level.

### **“Battle”**

Battle is also a word frequently used throughout much of the literature related to guerilla gardening. As demonstrated by the previous metaphor example, guerrilla gardeners consider their cause to be a battle for good. It is just another example of the terminology used within the warfare frame.

Why use the warfare frame? What is the purpose of using a potentially negative frame for a positive global environmental movement? The use of the warfare frame in general is very interesting. To some degree the use of the frame seems like a bit of a joke, and seems like it is done in a joking manner. Sometimes it seems like they took a frame generally used against (in a negative light) environmental movements and just ran with it. However, even if that is true, they are still a genuine movement, and they take their work

and actions very seriously. So in that way, the warfare frame is not a joke because the people within the movement are *that* dedicated to the cause.

Another purpose for using the warfare frame may be a response to passivity and apathy. Traditionally governments are not very good at reacting to environmental and community level problems. They tend to be slow and inefficient, if they end up doing anything at all. The warfare frame may be a response to that. The guerrilla gardening movement, while not directly anti-government, does work outside the governmental area. Using a guerrilla warfare frame speaks to that. The use of the warfare frame also challenges general passivity. This terminology is used to excite and activate individuals, in order to make actual changes in the community and the wider world.

Another final reason to use the warfare frame is because it works towards breaking down a different negative frame. It can help break down the frame that man and humanity are above nature. Lakoff establishes “the man above nature” frame, which is essentially where humans are considered better than nature. (Lakoff, 74). The presence of nature is only important when it can serve humans. The value of nature simply because it exists, is not important in this frame. However, guerrilla gardening is combatting that idea through the dissemination of their knowledge and their words. If the presence of nature among humans is something worth fighting for, it establishes ecology as equal to humans. They are striving to bridge the gap between traditional thought and framing, to one where humans and nature have a symbiotic relationship.

In conclusion, guerrilla gardening is an organization that is dedicated to protecting and creating urban space for plants and nature. They aim to better connect the community

to nature. Although they traditionally work outside the legal realm, they are not associated with any extreme eco-terrorist movement. The guerrilla gardening movement uses an interesting frame for their organization, which is the guerrilla warfare frame. As a result the organization uses many terms and metaphors that can be associated with war and guerrilla warfare. These terms vary from a frequent use of the word “battle”, to “the war on neglect”, to physical metaphors like seed bombs. The use of the warfare frame has many applications including: demonstrating the serious dedication to the cause that many members have, the breakdown of other negative metaphors, such as “man is above nature”, and, creating an enthusiastic environment that is cultured towards action and change, rather than disinterested apathy. In the end, the guerrilla gardening movement is fascinating, inside and out.

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