

GUNPOWDER PARK / ROBERT WILSONPROJECT
STAGE A WORKSHOP PROPOSAL

DAVID CHAPMAN

SOUNDWELL



Gunpowder Park The Field Station Sewardstone Road Waltham Abbey Essex EN9 3GP UK

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Proposal for Gunpowder Park: *Sound Well*

Preamble

As a response to the various discussions at the Robert Wilson workshops, I am proposing the construction of a subterranean sound sculpture - a sound well. This proposal takes into consideration a number of discussions and suggestions around the creation of sonic work on the site, particularly by Hubert von Goisern. The sound well could form a complementary work to the bell ideas proposed primarily by Hubert for the gates or disused electricity pylons. I am open to working in collaboration on this project with any other workshop participant who finds the concept engaging.

Proposal

The sound well could take two alternative forms. The first is event-oriented, and more contemplative in feel; the second invites participation.

1.

This Sound Well is a metallic sound sculpture comprising three sounding elements. The piece strikes at set times during the day, to create a distinctive and meditative event in the park. The sound elements once activated, resonate around the small chamber in which they are housed. It will act as focal point for people to gather in the park at certain times, mimicking the role of the clock automata found in several continental town squares.

The role of the sculpture as a 'time piece', reflects its proximity to the Greenwich meridian line which runs through the park. However, the timbre of the sculpture will be more redolent of eastern cultures, suggestive perhaps of temple gongs. This serves as a comment on both the role of the meridian as nominal centre of the world map and British imperial expansion, and the Gunpowder Park's former function as part of an industrial complex that help fuel the military power which made the Empire possible.

2.

This alternative version of the Sound Well takes a simple participatory form and is triggered by the dropping of small stones and pebbles through a grill at the top of the chamber. The sound will be different each time depending on the nature of the pebble and how it falls, hitting the sound elements in different patterns each time. As the chamber fills with stones, and as rain filters through and then evaporates, so the sonic experience will change throughout the seasons. This approach also reflects discussion at the workshop regarding ways of encouraging direct engagement of visitors.

This version, in the dropping of stones by the visitors, mirrors the idea of the Athenian-style voting box, as suggested by Benjamin Barber. It also evokes notions of wishing wells, and divination rituals. The timbre of the sounding elements is the same as the other version. The concept therefore remains very similar, although the visitor experience is markedly different.

Design

I envisage that the sculpture itself will comprise three sounding elements mounted on a metal stem. In Version 1 these will be struck by small hammers which create a chord reverberating within the chamber. They would be operated by a simple timing mechanism housed within the chamber and powered preferably by a small solar panel cell housed nearby.

The Sound Well design allows the sound to be clearly heard while ensuring that the structure is safe for visitors. The submerged structure will be protected from prevailing weather conditions and require minimal maintenance throughout the year.

Site

The Sound Well could most obviously be sited in the hole which has 'fortuitously' opened up in front of the field station. This could allow this feature to be utilised and rendered safe for visitors. However, the well could be sited at other sites in the park: near the meridian line would be an appropriate place. The depth of the chamber would take into consideration the decontamination 'capping' of the site, and therefore not exceed this depth (approx 6ft). Using a raised mound of earth (either pre-existing or specially created) extends the usable depth of the chamber.

David Chapman June 2006