

GUNPOWDER PARK / ROBERT WILSON PROJECT STAGE A WORKSHOP PROPOSAL

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Proposal for Gunpowder Park

With roots in a violent past but existing peacefully in a suburban present; framed by urban outposts (electric posts, a grocery warehouse, dense neighborhoods) yet with a vista to sky and river; a natural habitat and a developer's intrusion. These dualities were addressed in our conversations that focused on using the park as a community commons addressing the public's need for political and social relevance and as an outpost for artists work that evokes primal responses. Gunpowder Park is a manifestation of the coexistence of dualities.

It is a place to both mirror and subvert the political and social landscape. Politics and art reflect a dialogue between inner and outer states, and can stimulate people to engage as observers and participants, using the very real pathway that begins, literally, at the entryway, with one's first step into the park.

For a dancer, as Jeffrey Kastner suggests, "We aspire to leave our mark..." But a park visitor doesn't enter in order to dance, in fact, he's probably deeply reluctant to "dance" publicly. There are three kinds of uses that engage visitors in the dance:

- 1 / The Pathway as a Choreography,**
- 2 / The Park as a Stage for Performance**
- 3 / The Dwellings as a Mirror of Dance.**

The Pathway as a Choreography

People love to follow pathways, and to leave them, and return, to march in parades, to imitate, to identify patterns. Build the pathway, the "viewing circuit", with this in mind and the park itself becomes the dance instructor.

The whole park becomes a kind of maze guiding individuals by means of pathways, barriers, reminders and instructions designed to get the viewer to experience the park and his own movement through it. To get people to move, begin with the most elemental – walking, running, sitting, turning, reaching, twisting, bending, breathing. It's the "awareness" of oneself moving in relation to the landscape and other moving figures that evokes the sense of dancing. Noticing groups of people or individuals crossing paths, following another's footsteps, walking the meridian line while bells chime in the distance – these are all lessons in choreography.

I envision the pathway as a sensuous and touchable sculpture spiraling through the park with evocative reminders and instructions etched on stones, fence posts, vases, and other icons, reminiscent of Ian Hamilton Finlay's "Little Sparta" in Scotland. This sculptural pathway continues the park's evolution as a garden and ecological preserve. On the pathway, a visitor might encounter:

- * a narrow path bordered on each side by a row of soft downy plants at differing heights that you follow with your fingertips, causing you to lift your arms as you walk or run along ;
- * a path that ends suddenly with a view of sky and valley;
- * a pathway made of paving stones etched with a line of poetry, a single word on each stone, that is read, a step at a time, while walking;
- * two paths, for two individuals, approaching each other, converging, spiraling around each other, enticing the walkers into a dance;
- * a fence made of beautifully formed upright sticks, rounded on top, with instructions for the hands – right hand, left hand, right hand, left hand – creating a gestural choreography;
- * a stone garden, the stones, large and small, can be repositioned within the garden, with instructions to observe oneself and others in the process of transporting the stones;
- * a pathway of sand, to be raked over, after each journey back and forth, a meditation

The Park as a Stage for Performance

As a choreographer, I see the park as a kind of stage set, a giant dwelling, with all of its individual rooms (Shock Wave Galleries, Blast Mound Plateau, Salix, Energy Fields) in which we witness the progression of a relationship – the coming together of a new family of citizen/artists for the 21st century.

I envision a domestic play, enacted through choreographed movement by a company of dancers with the participation of park visitors. That site-specific, modern “ballet”, takes place in different locations, the large-scale “rooms” of the park, enacting rituals and habits of domesticity, the quotidian, life, and love.

The lovers meet secretly, with viewers following their midsummer idyll across the bridge and through the secret terrain of Osier Marsh. A wedding is mounted on the sloping meadow of Meridian Prospect. As the bride climbs slowly uphill toward her groom, her immense train is lifted and carried by observers who instantly recognize this ritual of procession. The family celebrates, a choreographed spectacle by the dancers, around a giant feasting table set in the open space of the Block House Field with the terraces of the Southern Slopes as natural viewing stands, followed by food and dancing and music for all. Ideally, this celebration would include a spectacle of dancers performing expansive movements from locations in and around the park (the Sainsbury roof?) incorporating unison movements that create “group cohesion” and can be performed ritualistically by all. The newlyweds exit by running the Meridian Path and escaping through the Field House to the world outside the park. They’ll be accompanied by a chorus – a different musical note will be assigned to different groups. When sung by performers and audience, the notes will create a symphonic chord that can be digitally combined and broadcast over local radio stations.

The Dwellings as a Mirror of Dance

The idea of individual dwellings that replicate the actual housing surrounding the park is intriguing and inspiring. Two ideas for using these Dwellings are: THEATER INSTALLATION and MOVEMENT HAIKU HOUSE.

THEATER INSTALLATION

Dances based on the real activities of a household, reduced in scale, made intimate to observers who look in through a window, voyeurs, gazing upon quotidian behavior distilled in gestures, pathways and physical renderings that fit into a small-scale house.

MOVEMENT HAIKU HOUSE

Another use of these dwellings is as a setting for creative activity that invites participation by all, regardless of age, culture, language, or gender. A “movement haiku” is a hybrid form that combines the poetic distillation of a theme in written or oral language with the gestural and movement language of dance. A “movement haiku house” is a gathering place, an open stage, of sorts, for the creation and performance of these small, individual “pieces.” It also becomes a “gallery” for the tangible footprints of this creative activity – the poem rendered on paper and secured to the walls of the house in a kind of collaged wallpaper to be built up over time as more and more people participate in the project.

The house can be a destination for outreach programs instituted in schools in the Greater Lee Valley community that choose to implement a “movement haiku” project or workshop in cooperation with Gunpowder Park. Local teaching artists who work in the classroom can serve as on-site instructors at Gunpowder Park. This project addresses specific curriculum needs such as literature, social studies, dance and physical education.

The pathway is the process, the experience is the footprint.
(balancing one’s own needs and desires against the realities of the world)

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