

This England 1998

For the Times/Artangel commissions, we proposed to build a 50-metre section of concrete ‘flyover’ in Green Park, London. Emerging from the trees would have been an imposing and apparently purposeful structure, a sweeping arc supported on tall piers. Yet as the viewer approached, it would have become clear that this was a fragment of infrastructure, displaced and unusable, which spanned only a hollow of gently sloping parkland.

The term ‘bridge’ is often used to express the concept of exchange between two parties and transition from one state to another. If these parties are seen as the worlds which lie above and below the surface – perhaps the subconscious and subterranean flows on the one hand, and the conscious actions of rational beings on the other – then *This England* might have symbolised a connection between them.

Resolutely functional in design and construction, *This England* would have been grounded in the disciplines of civil engineering and landscape architecture. With its physical form determined by the properties of its materials and the demands of the site, *This England* would have wildly celebrated the Modernist faith in the civilising power of reason to improve the public sphere.

However, part of the work’s aim as art would have been to tap into the collective consciousness of a buried life force. Located in relation to the former course of the buried river Tyburn, and to invisible patterns of energy such as the ‘desire lines’ expressed by people walking across the land, *This England* would have raised a monument to a series of contradictions.

On one level, the proposal presented a marriage of oppositions: the river as a sign for nature and the feminine, and the bridge as technology and the masculine. Yet the river is absent, perhaps even suppressed or denied, while the bridge would have been out of reach and without practical function. The work’s engagement with its setting would have remained poised between an ambitious public optimism and the private melancholy of a stalled dialectic or unfinished conversation.

This England is a magazine that has been published since 1968. Its sedate photographs of unspoilt countryside and nostalgic articles on English life are interspersed with poems offering moral guidance and editorials promoting reactionary views rooted in intolerance and fear of others.



Proposed location for *This England*
The buried course of the river Tyburn,
Green Park, London, 1998