

The Lincoln Assembly

A Place of Impossibility

A proposal by Alec Shepley, UK for *New Models on Common Ground*

RAQs Media Collective

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“The ruin is a ruin precisely because it has lost the presence of meaning, while retaining its suggestiveness. It bespeaks a loss of something, while denying complete irretrievability of the absent object. It evokes an ambivalent break from and nostalgia for the past. More pointedly, it signals the imminent breakdown of meaning, and therefore fosters dizzying compensatory discursive activity [].

The ruin, in many ways, is a trope of reflexivity, the reflexivity of a culture that interrogates its own becoming. As a result, the ruin is often the playground of strategies that tell us more about the identity of the beholder than that of the ruin or its original environment.”¹

¹ Author unknown, 2005 *Ruins of Modernity* - An International Conference and project at the University of Michigan (March 17-19, 2005)



The 'creative appropriation' of the spectator precipitated by ruin, its signification and to whom, is in many ways analogous to the fracture, dematerialisation and fragmentation of the physical and conceptual frame in contemporary visual art forms and the implications for spectators but also artists and for that matter educators and students.

"Under the intensity of creative experimentation (the situation and challenge of artists' practice) each work asks itself (and therefore us, too) whether there might be a 'place' where culture has not yet reached; it hopes to be that 'place' – an elsewhere that is not yet a 'place' on culture's terms"²

² Phillipson, M. 1995 *Managing 'Tradition: The Plight of Aesthetic Practices and their Analysis in a Technoscientific Culture* in Jencks, C. (Ed) 1995 'Visual Culture' Routledge, London and New York.



If institutional interests operate such an enclosing grip on the representation of cultural production is the prospect of a 'place for art' simply a utopian pipe dream?

Could the institute itself, as a place of articulation, examination, deconstruction and interrogation, be 'in ruins'?³

³ Shepley, A. & Dutton, S. 2013 *The institute of Ruin at Ta(l)king Place*, Sensuous Knowledge 7, an international conference at the Bergen Academy of Art & Design, Norway (22-25 January 2013)



Founded in October 2013, the Lincoln Assembly is an imaginary group with a fictitious constituency but focused on a place for art.

Through a three month residency (three x one month projects over two years) and a series of visual arts encounters with users and visitors of the proposed sites in North Delhi, The Assembly proposes to focus on the important question of the now and through a socio-curatorial practice, other key issues such as whether institutional frameworks can be (helpfully) seen as always being in ruins - perhaps *ruins in reverse* - constantly looking forward but seldom achieving their original ideal - or in other words incomplete projects?



In this project viewers will encounter physical manifestations of the incomplete project. Documents e.g. photographic records, will be registered on a faint index of incomplete works, unfinished maintenance and failings in the institutional fabric to both subvert and affect rhetorical frameworks and structures and remark on our present *condition*. These will be situated as temporary works or *signs* in and between the proposed sites.



Examples include everyday and quotidian instances of disfunctionality and signs of wear in the social fabric. The series of encounters will attempt to reimagine and create a kind of encampment around the 'place of possibility' referred to by Phillipson. This is why Palika Park is key to the project.

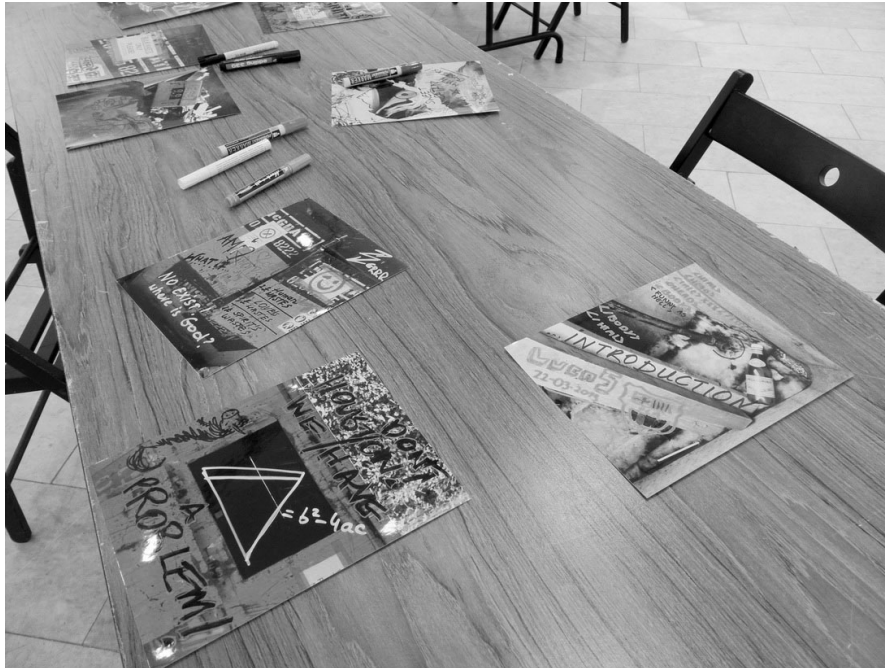
The project will also reference the place of fragments and removals from the sites, exploring notions of entropy and places of dis-assembly by focusing on images of detritus. This is why Skipper Tower is key to the project.



This property currently stands alone and silent amongst many busy office spaces. The possession of this 14 floor abandoned building currently rests under the Claims Commissioner, by the order of the Supreme Court of India.

Though there is no further information that was found about this building, the site in its present state of ruins and abandonment is definitely one that would form prove to an important catalyst in this project for micro engagements, if not a major final event.

Palika park attracts people from all walks of life: from the homeless to office workers, college students and many others, and is known not only for its nostalgic historicity and impressive built heritage. The areas sheer vitality of changing urban life with all its fullness and diversity is an essential site for this socio-curatorial project.



The images and fragments will draw parallels with the institutionalized space as a site of detritus.

The project aims to rethink expectations about the artwork, opening up the space to problematise assumptions of what may constitute a work of art. Visitors will be invited to scrawl, scribble, draw, doodle, write graffiti and obliterate the unframed photographs sited in the sites as a form of continuous encounter.



The project, through the use of encounters with people who are in the selected places, attempts to interrupt or occupy the image/site to bring it into the present - the now. The artwork/physical site become as one - experienced as incomplete project or ruin and in many ways a by-product of this experienced and discursive process.



The series of encounters will comprise being resident between the two proposed sites: Palika Park and Skipper Tower, N Delhi and using photographic referencing, and e.g. a notice board or table nearest to the site, plus an orientation map for the onlooker. Documents of encounters and conversations plus the images themselves will all go towards a rich multilayered content and a multimedia and multi-site installation will unfold through *living* the site.



All spectators will be invited, encouraged, coaxed, cajoled and persuaded to join in and collaborate, using whatever is available on site. We will collectively produce images (and possibly films using hand held devices if available) and invite onlookers and passers by to scribble, draw, write, mark, graffiti and affect the images being produced. Some images may be totally obliterated. In this way spectators through an occupation of the image, reimagine the space anew. All will be curated as an ongoing interactive installation.

Finally, at the end of the process a book will be made and published together with any textual and verbal commentary gleaned during the project. There will also be a short film made available after the project.



Disturbing the desired 'seamlessness' of the institution's self image by pointing to actual seams opening up or failings in the infrastructure, use/non-use/ misuse, is perhaps less to do with place and more to do with an as yet undefined space – i.e. a *proximity*. This project attempts to bring about a reinvigorated proximity to place through a dynamic encounter with the abandoned or ruined site and the public place.

This ongoing process within the potential space of ruin or incompleteness was further explored in the joint paper by Shepley and Dutton at 'Sensuous Knowledge 7' in January 2013 'The Institute of Ruin', where this question of how the practice of suspending the work in an unresolved state was explored in detail in relation to the creation of institutions.⁴

⁴ Shepley, A. & Dutton, S. 2013 *The institute of Ruin at Ta(l)king Place*, Sensuous Knowledge 7, an international conference at the Bergen Academy of Art & Design, Norway (22-25 January 2013)



The project proposed underlines what Nick Temple described in his 2013 essay as ‘the creative potential of the fragment to restore our embodied relationship to the world’.⁵

This new work reflects on whether it is less about constructing new institutions but perhaps more about a reimagining of the existing institution with all its flaws and accepting that institutions are always ruinous – failing in a way to remain in tact and yet always coming into being – in a nascent state.

In the now.

⁵ Temple, N. *Unfinished Narrative* Catalogue Essay in *Entropic Union* an installation by Alec Shepley and Clive McCarthy at Galleria Legnica, Poland (22 March – 19 April, 2013)



New Models on Common Ground. RAQs Media Collective Proposal, Alec Shepley, UK, October 2013.

