

Bus Stops in Armenia

I'm waiting, not waiting. I'm there (Robert Lax)

They belong to those everyday, ordinary things, perhaps attract particular attention from no one who waits here daily and hardly from anyone traveling past. Bus-stops in Armenia, the oldest Christian country in the world, which scarcely anyone can precisely situate any longer. Architectural structures from the 1970s and '80s of the last century, the heroic age of Socialist building. They stand alone, and no single one resembles another. Along stretches which connect places whose names are totally unknown to us and difficult to pronounce. Lined up along the road, along the horizon. The horizon opens above and below. This road leads from Goris to Khndsorek.

They stand beside it, on the edge or in between. As the photographs show them, they stand there entirely for themselves and at the same time in a clear and rigorous relationship. The time of day, weather, light, a diffusely scattered light: in black and white, the small architectures of waiting are brought into relationship with the topography of the edge of settlement, with the mountain range in the distance and the road in the foreground, and are thereby intensified, clearly honed in upon themselves. With minimalistic stringency, the photographic intervention draws an arc from the waiting spaces across the expanse of no-man's land and steppe, all the way to the horizon. In such a way that the pictorial space unfolds from the line of the horizon running through the center of the picture, slightly below it or slightly above. In such a way an interpenetrating correspondence of things is manifested in the picture, an architecture of a different order: a place.

The neurologist Wolf Singer has compared the complex interactive networks of skyscrapers with the highly organized structures and processes of the brain. Can one draw corporeal analogies with respect to the bus-stops? The parameters of the architecture always seem, in any case, to be like those of the body. Function and form, positioning in space, posture and gesture, the relationship between natural and cultural space, inside and outside. Body and architecture do not simply fit into places but elucidate them, interrelate and intensify relationships to places. Both body and architecture have something to do with "building" in the etymological sense of the word, which means "dwelling." But in any case, and the photographs show this as well: temporarily, for the time being. Time made visible: building time, time of decay, time in the bodies, time of day, waiting time. At the moment of the exposure, time becomes compressed: the time of waiting for the right light, the right constellation, the time of talking with those who wait. In the process of this compression – that is to say, through the waiting itself – photography becomes "constructive." Photography and time, architecture and time.

Self-assured architectures but anonymous, as though from Old Masters. Concrete with inset mosaics, iron bent into ornaments. Attempts to make something beautiful, something special, a form from the formless. Thereby, the bus-stops recall other archetypes from the architectonic repertory: dolmen, pavilion, power station, bunker, filling station, loading ramp; or things like container, umbrella, seesaw, a wave frozen in its forward curl. Elementary gestures: bulging, interlocking, the penetration of horizontal and vertical elements as in the case of the Suprematists. Covering, enveloping, protecting: the etymological meaning of "waiting" is "protecting," "guarding." As previously remarked, temporarily. Openings in the walls, light outside, dark inside. Frames for steppe-sky-rectangles, for the boundless. Views. And the photographs: views of views.

The remains of cemented foundations, islands for the shipwrecked, modest arks of the quotidian which could drift away at any time to nearby Mount Ararat. Sometimes the roof is missing, occasionally almost everything is missing. A roofless iron skeleton through which wind and weather can pass unhindered, offering only a sign, a suggestion of protection. But there, too, someone has taken shelter, with an opened umbrella. Interior spaces out of doors. Yet as demarcations in space, their strength and meaning persist unabatedly. No paths to be seen that lead to this point or that lead away from it. Even the paths that lead to the photographic exposure remain invisible, can only be guessed at. In the moment of the "exposure" – with its English meaning of photographic exposure-time and vulnerability – the overwhelming continuum of "dark" time contracts in a flash. The indicative seeing of photography arises from the darkness.

Many are waiting alone, others together. Even beneath the most ramshackle construction, someone is standing or sitting. How would it be if the bus-stops were not so different from each other, but all the same? Would the postures of those waiting be different? Is it only the case of people making architecture or also the other way around, of architecture making people? Is there a space formed by waiting? There is indeed; it is the space of relationships, a time-space. A condition unencumbered for a short while, temporarily removed from the world of actions. A floating condition of the intermediary. Temporary interruption of circumstances in one of the most fragmented areas of the world.

They are not waiting somewhere or other at the edge of the road, which would probably be just as feasible. Those waiting could also sit down, but most of them – above all the women – are standing. As though with this physical gesture of self-assertion they sought to adapt to the architectural form. Even if sometimes, in relationship to a construction that has already been very weakened by time, this is visibly an exhausted or melancholy standing. The bus-stops, small monuments of perseverance on the edge of things, in no-man's land. The figures of those waiting, in posture, clothing and expression: signs, erected in the midst of the overwhelming gravity of circumstances – heroic, mundanely comic, in any case human and dignified.

Photography creates an image of this. Like architecture, it does not work on the substance but as process, out of the relationship. A saying above the entrance to the Akbar mosque in the ruins of the Indian city of Fatepur – regarded, after all, as great architecture – reads: "The world is a bridge. Go across it, but do not build your dwelling there." Precisely that ambiguity is signaled by the Greek word "utopia": eutopos, the good place, and outopos, no-place.

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