

Bus stop



Deserts have a deficit of moisture, however they often provide clarity through light and vision. Like all landscape, the desert is a discursive terrain across which the struggle between different, and often hostile codes of meaning may be enacted. The erection of a bus shelter, or almost any built structure within the Australian desert reflects a non-indigenous desire for stability, order and hope within the contemporizing energy of nature. In this landscape the constructed form seems momentary and is in dialectical opposition to the vastness of time embodied in the land. A bus shelter, an outwardly sensible structure is transformed within this context to personify a seemingly perverse futility and obstinacy, and perhaps a hopefulness within a perplexing and bewildering landscape.

Bus stops are the places where we get on, offering a point for delivery and a place of safety. Michael Wegerer encountered a bus stop within a desert community in the north of Australia, a transit station; a space that embodied waiting.

Wegerer wrapped the bus stop in plastic cling film and using black marker pens carefully traced all lines within the structure, including graffiti. There is a tenacity embodied in this complex tracing and a determination to capture fragments of life, akin to the impulse to record sound or to make videos. Wegerer returned to Europe with a ball of cling film, his tracing. The tracing became a pattern for the reconstruction of the bus stop, a shelter made in paper as a life size model, a fragile residue and a proposition. In undertaking

this process Wegerer suggests a type of revelation. Firstly, through the initial event in which the form is revealed as a schematic tracing or drawing, then through a form of re-enactment, almost resurrection, where the initial structure is carefully and delicately re-built in paper.

However in Australia there are significant discourses surrounding Land, the issues of possession and dispossession, and the relationships of indigenous to non-indigenous cultures. Wegerer expresses hope that his work may be viewed as an 'open' work, however he is also conscious of arriving within an unfamiliar terrain and falling into the position of working from an outside viewpoint. Mindful of this Wegerer worked with members of the local desert community to make the tracing, to connect in some other way and to form a testimony to an event.

'Everyone who draws or writes knows that they retrace lines of thought that have already been taken, that their lines if good are wiser than the wit that produced them. Whoever does mathematics Ernst Mach reflected, "will occasionally have the uncanny sense that his science and even his pencil are more clever than he." The same is true of artists. They often paint more than they intended.'¹

Wegerer's work marks the moment of an outsider, the artist as a tourist, encapsulating a cursory experience while traveling. Wegerer's bus stop is a drawing and a snapshot, a reconfiguration that can simply and only be viewed in fragments or parts. Evidence of a disconnected experience, reminding us of the need for context, and that '... space that has been seized ... by the imagination cannot remain an indifferent space ... It has been lived in with all the partiality of the imagination.'²

Wegerer's impulse in making this work appears to be centered on incongruity, the impossibility of a bus shelter standing alone in the northern Australian desert. His compulsion to make this work is an honest response based on an open and simple visual epiphany. However Wegerer has also captured the parallelisms and convergences between Land, shelter, ownership and reality. The vexed domain of the post colonial pervades each and every discourse relating to Land within Australia. The Land is owned, but by whom? The paper structure symbolizes the fleeting nature of built structures in this environment, of shelters, of a bus stop – no city will ever grow here. In this fragile landscape the bus stop could just as easily mark the end of something rather than a beginning. The European connection to this Land may be speculative, changed as simply as a bus route can be altered. Wegerer's bus shelter alludes to our best efforts to identify location and to occupy land, however provisional, through our built forms. He hints at the spatial rhetoric of colonization, the manufactured outpost, a sign based on mimicry that states that the ground is occupied. There are no seamless vistas within the landscapes that surround isolated desert communities in Australia as the terrain is often abruptly interrupted by simply built utilitarian forms that from one point of view, are not unlike a stain on a photograph.

In his desire for this work to remain 'open' Wegerer recognizes that all visitors to the bus stop will see it differently and that these visions filtered through the Australian perspective are as complex as any language. Wegerer's delicate paper works are not permanent constructions and generally cease to exist after they have been exhibited. They are momentary residual echoes. In returning this humble shelter to Europe, repatriating and reconstructing a 'European artifact' from the northern Australian desert, Wegerer creates a thoughtful ghost.

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Notes:

1. Carter, P., *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design*, p3. University of Hawai'i Press, 2009
2. Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space*, pxxxvi, Beacon Press, 1994

Pic: *Desert Bus Stop*, folded packing paper-architecture, screen print exhibition view, Vienna 2010