

Series Number Eight

Downtown City Spaces - 1988/89

Eight Photographs

Essay - January, 2024



City Spaces 9

City Spaces

A Photographer pays attention to both bright restless light and darker quieter light. A photograph freezes all things in motion.

My first memory of being in a downtown city space was walking along Chaparral Street in Corpus Christi, Texas. I was five years old. Downtown businesses were booming – crowds of people were walking in and out of Lichtenstein's department store. Men wore suits with fashionable hats, women dressed in long flowing flowery dresses and neck scarves blowing in December's windy chill. At that time there were no malls – no competing shopping centers – downtown was the only heartbeat that mattered. It was important to be a part of the rush of serious shoppers. I remember a moment on a street corner. I was holding my mother's hand and in the next instant I was holding the hand of a strange older woman. Looking down, she was smiling at me. I still don't know how this could have happened.

When I was a practicing attorney and had a jury trial approaching, I would walk the downtown streets of San Antonio rehearsing my Voir Dire examination. (General statement of facts and selection of a jury.) I remember wanting to be somewhere else. Inside, I felt water boiling on the stove. I watched the light moving on buildings, business men and women walking rapidly and then stopping to turning around as if they forgot something. I was leaning everywhere except where I was. Every street corner was a black and white photograph.

In neighborhoods, residents are a part of the narrative, but not so much in downtown city spaces. In these spaces there are too many moving parts. In these unusual places we must pay attention to our senses. Experience is heightened. Humanity is compressed. Sight and sound merge into a single experience. Burning sunlight appearing between buildings can look like the sound of screeching tires. The common experience in downtown city spaces is anonymity and a feeling of passing through.

City Spaces – Photographs

Visually, two aspects of downtown city spaces dominate attention. The first is the "Streets/ Ground Level". The second are the "Buildings and Skyscrapers" above. Each can be seen as a horizontal strip. The FIRST - "Ground/Street Level" - is an ambiguous essay of human activity. Mostly people are going somewhere, waiting for something or leaving.

The SECOND aspect, is the “Buildings and Skyscrapers” themselves. The many floors of heavy concrete and metal are secured and planted in their iron-ery roots. What moves is only light passing. At midday, the harsh light on building walls is a constellation of perpendicular lines and complementary angles. It is in these moments, the range of bright light mixed with deep shadows reveals the limitation of seeing. Light lifts and streaks, then falls and disappears into dark grays and soft blacks. Light blue in sunlight turns into dark grey in shadows.

This short series of photographs is about the experience of being, “intertwined”. It is about bringing together the street level with the building level. Each photograph is really two images, these are diptychs. The ground level (first image) and the buildings above (second image) are connected with a black line. Each diptychs/photograph is not pretending to be one moment in time.

I found that if I photographed the buildings from a distance, the ground level would be tiny. If I photographed the ground/street level closer up - the range of the lens optics and perspective would not reach or distort the top building spaces. The rising building spaces were photographed from a distance and the street ground levels were photographed closer up. I wanted to photograph the city spaces in the ways I experienced them, BEING THERE, looking upward sometimes, other times looking down.

Why do downtown city spaces look the way they do? Every building has an entryway and inside exists a whole city of its own. All the private conversations and sideway glances measure mood. Morning light does not rise on buildings but it falls as the sun rises. Wind does not blow, but swirls. In winter, these spaces are warmer than the suburbs or farmlands. Downtowns stands as a symbol for a city’s historical heart and a study of utility, self-interest and invisibility.

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City Spaces 1

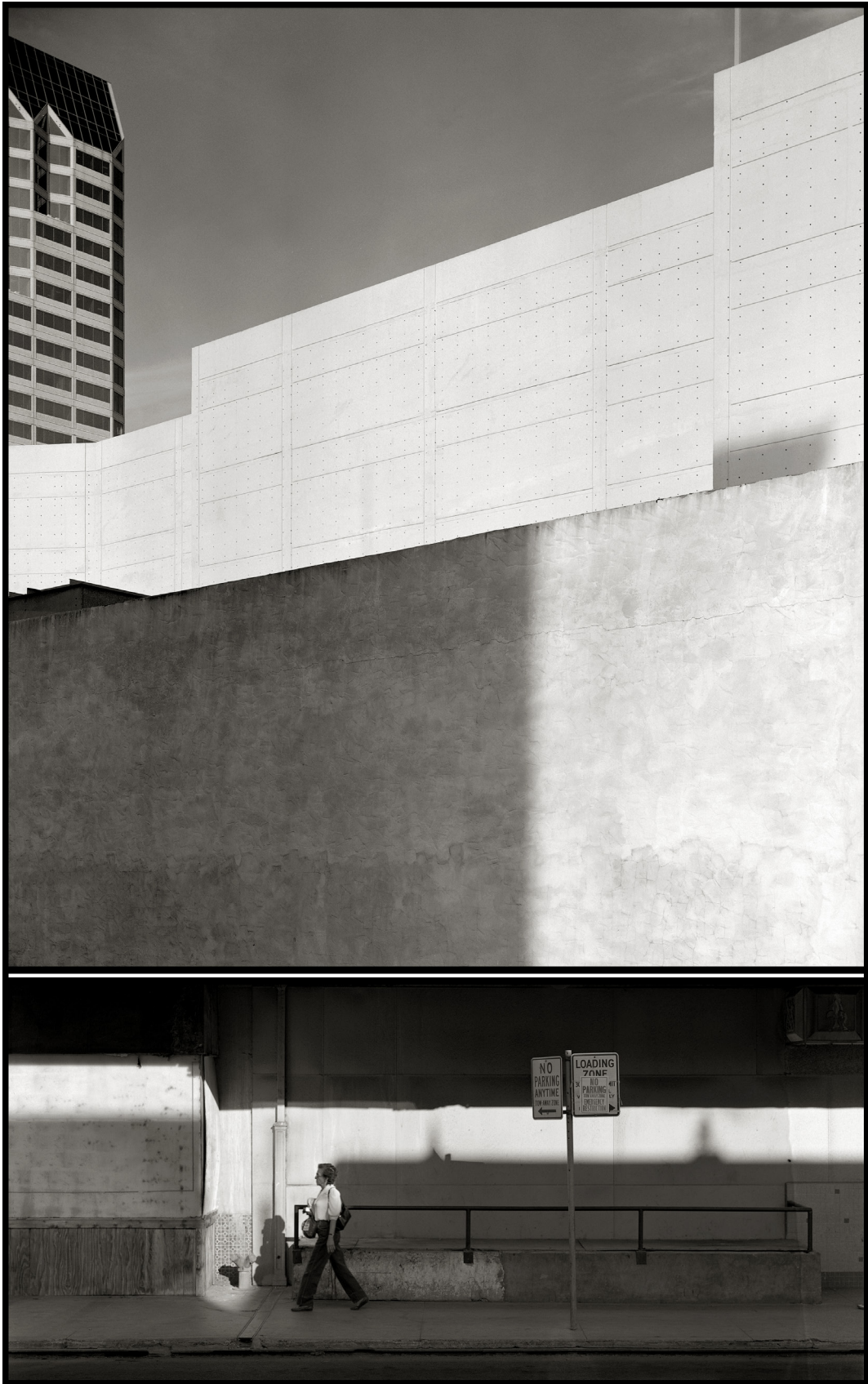


City Spaces 2



City Spaces 3

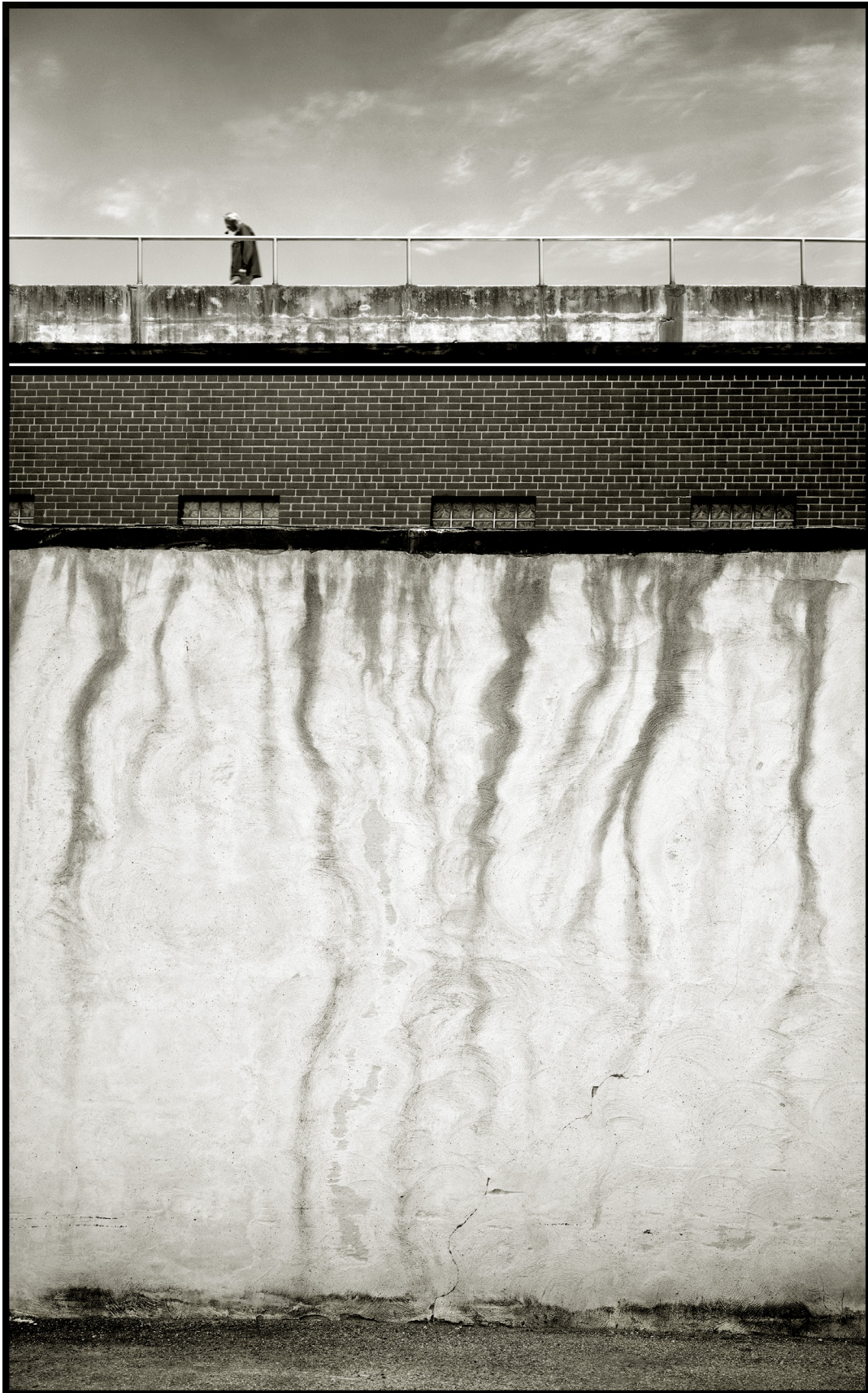




City Spaces 5



City Spaces 6





City Spaces 8