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Meeting Places

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Meeting Places

Graduate Thesis
Master of Fine Arts
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

By
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INTRODUCTION

In our postindustrial world, esoteric concepts of time and space have been subjugated by a desire for what is familiar and comfortable, resulting in an vast environment of pedestrian spaces. Ubiquitous architecture and contrived landscaping have standardized the everyday landscape. Living in a world created for our convenience and comfort as consumers has almost imperceptibly changed our collective awareness of space. As our nation changes from a manufacturing to a service economy, simulation and replication learned from the assembly line, have been applied to architecture, mass media and culture. While our awareness is slow these changes are rapid. A sense of community based on an common location or shared culture has been relegated to the back of the American consciousness, superceded by a curated hyper-reality that exists somewhere between our daily interaction with mass produced architecture and the flood of televised and mainstream imagery.

My photographic representation of these visually ordinary spaces reflects the externalization and impermanence of the infrastructure of everyday life. The tradition of landscape photography allows the photograph to appear as a truthful document. My role as an artist is to apply the conventions of photography creating a sense of objectivity which transforms this rapidly evolving environment into an artifact for contemplation.

Using the common language of ubiquitous space to create conceptual landscapes, my photographs explore this purposeful construction of our experiences through a seemingly objective representation of physical space. The relationship between art and observer becomes a metaphor for the relationship of people in their everyday environments.
"The joy in an excess of meaning, when the bar of the sign slips below the regular water line of meaning: the non-signifier is elevated by the camera angle. Here the real can be seen to have never existed (but "as if you were there"), without the distance which produces perspective space and our depth of vision (but "more true than nature")."¹

Baudrillard’s dilemma of the real as defined through it’s representations is an apt analogy to the photographer’s pursuit of an objective image. Mimicking the construction of our postindustrial experience through corporate iconography and architecture, I am intentionally constructing reflections of our experiences.
The work that formed my graduate thesis has its basis in the undergraduate work I completed at the Rhode Island School of Design. My ongoing interest in the Post-Industrial age and the many consumer markets it has spawned is reflected in this series of photographs. In “The Construction of Experience” I explored the shopping mall, and the standardized system that has constructed this landscape of the new American culture. Commercial architecture’s design, focused on convenience and corporately defined attractiveness, has been built for automotive society.

In his book The McDonaldization of Society, George Ritzer coins the term “McDonaldization” to describe the process of franchising a variety of goods and services across society. This system assumes a dependency upon the automobile, one stop shopping, standardization, the conforming of customs, morals, ethics, and purchasing habits as culture’s definer of identity and access to the American dream. Michael Sorkin aptly describes the system when he writes, “Here is urban renewal with a sinister twist, an architecture of deception which, in its happy-faced familiarity, constantly distances itself from the fundamental realities. The architecture of this city is almost purely semiotic, playing the game of grafted signification, theme-park building. Whether it represents generic historicity or generic modernity.”

To create a discourse reflecting the homogenization of the American landscape, I sequenced this photographic series of anonymous and everyday, interrelated images. The standardized landscape’s use of ubiquitous or commercial architecture and contrived landscaping creates an unavoidable connection between places. Whether you have been there literally or to a place just like it, you have been there before.
Figure 1.

Predella #1

Figure 2.
Providence, RI. 2000.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.
Warwick, RI. 2000.

Figure 5.
Warwick, RI. 2000.

Figure 6.
Warwick, RI. 2000.

Figure 7.
Providence, RI. 2000.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.
East Providence, RI. 2000.

Figure 10.

Figure 11.
Figure 12. Predella #2

Figure 13. Providence, RI. 2000.

Figure 14. Providence, RI. 2000.

Figure 15. North Attleboro, MA. 2000.

Figure 16. North Attleboro, MA. 2000.

Figure 17. Johnston, RI. 2000.

Figure 18. Providence, RI. 2000.

Figure 19. Johnston, RI. 2000.
This standardization influenced by the construction of a contrived culture in post-modern times has created an American vernacular architecture of the decorated sheds. Franchised stores, services, and restaurants are increasingly avoiding the shopping center or mall space, preferring to create a stand alone building, with its own surrounding parking area, to their own specifications. The created establishment is designed to exist independently of its surroundings. A collective corporate image can be projected with more strength when individual differences between stores are diminished. What the postmodern landscape has learned from the architecture of Las Vegas is to develop an experience for the consumer that can be replicated for the benefit of the franchise. These types of spaces have an obvious intended experience for the consumer reflected symbolically in their architecture. Relationships in the sequences showed the displacement, cause, and effects of a landscape that is constructed for the automobile.

For example, the first image of the second sequence Mall. Providence, RI. 2000. depicts cars parked in front of Providence Place mall. Through the use of scale, the car became an unavoidable icon, with the travel mug in the window adding its own commentary about America “on the go.”
The last image the of two-part sequence Johnston, RI. 2000. Transformed suburban houses into a representation of the consumers of this culture, highlighting the similarities between their homes and the architecture surrounding them. The photographs examine the American Dream, the promise that in America any person can work hard enough own a home and be financially independent.

Figure 21.

In the development of my own photographic vision, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Robert Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, and Thomas Demand are photographers who have provided artistic stimulation. Among my primary photographic sources, is Walker Evans’ *American Photographs*. Evans speaks about the sense of uniqueness in a life in which everything is the same through his two part sequencing of the images about the American homogenized beauty. In the first sequence of images, Evans explores people and their created place in American culture. Photographing boots, utensils, churches, signs, and other everyday objects, he transformed them into icons of the quest for a cultural identity and the American Dream. The shift to landscape and American architecture in the second sequence, showed the negative effects of the growing material culture. Lincoln Kirstein remarks on this aspect of Evans photographic style in his essay, *Photographs of America: Walker Evans* “the eye of Evans is open to the visible effects, direct and indirect.”

An example of Evans’ systematic look at American culture’s homogenized beauty can be seen in the sequencing of the following passage from *American Photographs: Louisiana Plantation House, 1935., Stamped Tin Relic, 1929., View of Easton, Pennsylvania, 1936. Part of Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1936, View of Ossining, New York, 1930., and Street and Graveyard in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1936. The group of six images I have chosen begins with the last image of Part One and continues with the first five images from part two. The last image from Part One: *Louisiana Plantation House, 1936*, an image of decay, death, and displacement, foreshadows
metaphorically the future the reader sees in Part Two and of the "America" Evans photographed.

*Stamped Tin Relic, 1929.* The first image in Part Two is the only one in the book with a suggestive instead of a factual title. In an ironic statement of significant relevance, we see that Evans' relic is actually a detail of a stamped tin tile mutilated and crushed, laying in rubble and dirt. As with the earlier images in the book, the meaning of this image is strengthened by *View of Easton, Pennsylvania, 1936, Part of Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1936, View of Ossining, New York, 1930,* and *Street and Graveyard in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1936,* which follow. Each depicts industrial architecture; towns built for, by, and to serve the need of industry.

Evans horizontally layered the framing *View of Easton, Pennsylvania, 1936,* and *Part of Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1936,* uses form metaphorically to mimic the hierarchy of the town. In the foreground of the images and therefore in the position of highest importance is transportation: trains, and a bridge. In the middle in both images are industry and warehouses. Relegated to the background are the cookie cutter houses of those who work in the factories. *View of Ossining, New York, 1930,* an overview of apartment buildings and multifamily houses, is used as a segue to a new theme.
Evans has again divided the image into three in the sixth image, *Street and Graveyard in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1936.*, but this time vertically. On the left side of the image is a graveyard. In the middle of the image a road with parked cars, sidewalks, and telephone poles on each side leading us down the center of the image to the steeple of a church. On the right rows of identical houses line a street leading to business. The sequence I selected at the beginning shows the power of nature, an uprooted tree, followed by the power of man. We as the viewer begin to see the *Stamped Tin Relic, 1929.* taking on dual meanings as both the death of the individual, and homogenization of mass produced American.

The photographic work of Walker Evans illustrates another subject of particular interest to me, the extent to which photographs of "America" may be contrived. Evans has defined his work as "documentary in style." However he uses the conventions of photography, the suggestion that a photograph is a slice of reality, to get the viewer to question the surrounding world. Can these realistic images that Evans created through his fictitious filter reveal to us what he has seen?
Robert Frank's work, principally The Americans first published in the United States in 1959, also provided much inspiration. A Swiss immigrant, Frank views American culture from an external perspective. Associated with the outsider "beat" generation of artists, Frank's view was not commonly portrayed or discussed among Americans. His poetic photographic sequencing almost suggests a film seen directly through the eye of the camera or the eye of the photographer. I became interested in how Frank constructed his photographs, repeating symbols that become iconographic when revealed throughout the sequencing of the book. Everyday items thought as markers of success become icons of America's failure. Cars, crosses, flags, gestures, televisions, and jukeboxes were used symbolically and strategically.

In the following sequence of images Frank uses icons to create a grim, almost black, social critique of America in the 1950's. The images in this sequence include: Covered Car - Long Beach, California., Car accident - U.S. 66, between Winslow and Flagstaff, Arizona., U.S. 285, New Mexico., Bar - Detroit., and Barber Shop Through Screen Door - McClellanville, South Carolina. Symbolically the first three images are related with the use of the automobile, whether present or implied. The first image Covered Car - Long Beach, California. depicts a car covered by a tarp framed between two palm trees with a trailer in the background, illuminated by the angled light of a sunrise or sunset. In this photograph the representative shape of the covered car becomes an icon articulating the rising automobile culture in which the car has become spectacle.
When placed in a sequence before *Car Accident - U.S. 66, between Winslow and Flagstaff, Arizona., U.S. 285*, a grim allusion emerges. The image of a dead body covered by a blanket with four onlookers changes the viewer’s thoughts and brings to mind the death of the American dream. The car is every car and the deceased is anyone of us. In this photograph the victim of the accident, the effect of the car on humanity becomes the spectacle.

*U.S. 285, New Mexico.*, depicts a automobile driving on a road that fills the frame with asphalt until about three-quarters of the image and continues throughout the frame. What I particularly like about this image is that it is open for interpretation both in conjunction with other images in the sequence and as a single image. By itself the image depicts the loneliness and emptiness of the road, while the relation with the previous two images suggests riding off to the horizon as an ending. This creates a fascinating multitude of meanings, especially when one applies the connotations of an onlooker at an accident to those of the viewer of a photograph.
Image four Bar - Detroit., depicts on the left a framed reproduction of a portrait of George Washington, in the middle an American flag, and on the right Abraham Lincoln. The positioning of the symbols in this image challenges the notion of the objective lens as it raises new questions and redefines American iconography. Are their eyes omniscient or vacant? How would they react to the America that Frank photographs? The fifth image, Barber Shop Through Screen Door - McClellanville, South Carolina., presents the artist’s reflection in the middle of the frame with that of a house to the left. Inside of Frank’s shadow we see a barber chair. In this image Frank is in the seat of judgment, revealing all.

The series also provides an updated commentary on Manifest Destiny, the nineteenth century belief that: “the United States had a divine, God-given right to expand its land territory and divine mission to serve as a democratic, political model for other nations.”\textsuperscript{4}, as well as commentary on the repercussions of technology and mass production, and the reassessment of basic and eternal human struggles.
In the forward to *Denver A Photographic Survey of the Metropolitan Area*, 1977, Robert Adams writes, "My goal was not only to record the animate and inanimate fragments, but to show the totality, the landscape." It is Adams’ reference to what we have constructed in this culture and how things are so easily consumed in every variety which engages me; homes, cars, food products, everyday items, luxury items, and even the land. He makes pictures of the banal growth of Denver repulsive, yet beautiful and intriguing at the same time. The presence of man is revealed by his garbage, creating formalist views of American highway culture. Published in 1995, *What We Bought: The New World*, expanded the ideas explored in the earlier publication. Adams’ photographs reference the effect of American materialism on the landscape.
A sequence of ten images following the construction of a housing development in the order of construction. The first two images in the foreground depict the early stages of construction, with building materials out and basement poured. The background reveals to these structures and are new houses in an growing development. The third image shows us a few out of a house with the walls up, but with no roof. Through the window of the construction we see many similar houses. The next image depicts a side of a house unfinished. The fifth image has a three section horizontal. In the foreground is a undeveloped field, the middle shows houses under construction, and background shows existing houses in the development. The sixth image is of boards and a plowed over field, showing the constructions waste in the environment.

Figure 35. Robert Adams Image #1

Figure 36. Robert Adams Image #2

Figure 37. Robert Adams Image #3

Figure 38. Robert Adams Image #4

Figure 39. Robert Adams Image #5

Figure 40. Robert Adams Image #6
waste in the environment. Images seven, eight, and nine are completed houses with all the construction materials still there and the destruction of the surrounding land. The last image, a child riding a bike in front of a big pile of dirt, is a comment on what these mass constructions give us, as well as what they take away. We receive a ubiquitous mass produced experiences in exchange for our natural environment.
I began looking at contemporary German photography while working on the project in Rhode Island. I continue to be greatly influenced by photographers such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, and Thomas Demand. I became interested in the similarities the German photographers shared with American photographers such as Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Robert Adams and the other photographers of the “New Topographics.” All these photographers portrayed what might be considered mundane subjects and places with a particular photographic sense of objectivity. These photographers were not trying to provoke the viewer emotionally or morally, rather they were trying to show the viewer what they had seen.

August Sander and his contemporary Christopher Isherwood photographed the transformation of German society in the early part of the twentieth century. Both systematically documented every class and rank of individual. The work of Isherwood and Sander was a precursor to the systematic work of Bernd and Hilla Becher and to that of their students at in the photography department in Düsseldorf Germany. While their work defined German culture through architecture, it also reflected Isherwood and Sander’s scientific photographic style.

The characteristics of the Becher’s photographs are consistent if not precise in method: a straight forward view, focus slightly above center, sharp detail, and
overall light with little shadow. Further, the documentary realism the Bechers achieved photographing heavy industrial structures appear to have no author. The project preserves in photographs actual structures that are about to disappear, it is a private more psychological space. Reflecting the culture, the Bechers suppress the individual characteristics of the objects in the scenes they photograph. The detailed individual images are less significant than the interrelationship between the all the images as a whole.

Practitioners of taxonomy or cataloging, the Bechers teach their students specialism, or the narrowed pursuit of a specific subject matter. Their use of seriality as a form of expression and of mundane execution as a control have made the most evident impact on the artists whose studied under the team and whose photographic work matured in the 1980s. Photographers greatly influenced by the Bechers include: Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, and Thomas Demand. These students, however, with new and accessible technology, have opted to stray from the Becher’s traditional black and white grid of photographs in favor of well crafted color images. They have also expanded photographic images to include a variety of other social interests influenced by popular culture, including issues that originally surfaced in the 1960s such as the role of the museum on the exhibition and interpretation of art. The images by these photographers, while often produced in a similar systematic style to the photographs of the Bechers, are meant to be singular objects. The prints are unique or part of a small edition.
Andreas Gursky’s photographs share the same orderly method of control employed by the Bechers, but reflect his interest in science. “A typical Gursky photograph characterizes the transition from the industrial to the postindustrial ages, from the mechanical transformation of nature to the electronic transformation of space and time, into various points of energy.”

Like his teachers, the Bechers, Gursky looks at the mundane objects and places. A captivation with mass and a congregation of the ubiquitous are experiences which interest Gursky photographically. A cataloguer of affinities, Gursky began photographing in Germany, capturing the “peripheral landscapes” auto routes and rivers edge. Later Gursky began to include images of places were people congregate: airports, factory interiors, cafeterias, and subjects he felt projected “a global orientation.” He began photographing in places outside of Germany including, America and the Far East. As a photographer Gursky does not direct the viewers eye to concentrate on one specific area of the photograph. Rather, the viewer must consider the whole image and all its detail. Gursky is not trying to move the viewer emotionally or morally, he is not critiquing global politics, he is not trying to explain the world, he is just showing the viewer what he sees.
Reflecting the influence of Jan Vermeer, Adolf Menzel, the German Romantic painters, Jackson Pollock, and Henri Matisse, pictorial value and painterly density are two of Gursky’s concerns in the selection of location. Gursky’s photographs have no moral or cynical undertones, everything is treated equally. The subtle use of people in his photographs make them disappear and become just a part of the landscape. Gursky’s photographs show the relationship between culture, nature, and technology. “Gursky’s images of global commerce resemble neither the mechanist celebration of technological progress nor the humanist critique of labor of the early twentieth century.”

Gursky, along with Struth has investigated many public spaces, confirmed in the museum photographs, that skew the line between the artwork and the actual space of the gallery. In a Gursky work, any sense of progression is denied by the monotonous repetition of mass-cultural styles and production. Carter Ratcliff recently noted, “Gursky’s obsession with all over form, discerning in the artist’s rendering of his subjects the compositional technique of Pollock as well as the repetitions of Minimalism.” Gursky’s photographic method employs the structure and rigor of the Minimalist grid, in which he photographs ordinary objects, placing them into aesthetic terms. Gursky can transform the shelves of the upscale Prada boutique to become a portrait of common places. Gursky’s is able to photograph a minimalist interior, making it more minimal. Creating photographs which play with form and repetition.
Andreas Gursky has given photographers emerging in the late 1980s a whole new set of standards in the production and treatment of the photographic image. The photographs are lavishly produced Cibachromes. The perspective of the omniscient, used by Gursky, transports the viewer to the place of the photograph. Incredible detail, captured by a large format camera, gives the viewer an opening into the quiet, mundane views that Gursky photographs. In what appears to be a scientific eye for photographing, a form of mapping takes place within the image through which mundane, banal subject matters, become interesting. The perspective of the photographs is usually raised and distanced using a telephoto lens, providing the viewer with an overview. Paradoxically, Gursky photographs which are taken from a distance are also close ups of the view. Each picture, no matter what the subject matter is, works as an individual image and does not have to be a part of a series. Norbert Messier wrote in an essay on Gursky “...the artist makes the fundamentals of his concept clear: landscape, places and people, neutrally illustrated and trouble free, are photographed with a high degree of precision.”

Figure 50. Andreas Gursky
Atlanta.
Evident by choice of subject matter and formal decisions, Thomas Struth’s photographs are the closest to the Bechers in spirit. Photographs in his series of streets and cities create a broad sociological landscape, forcing the viewers eye to wander throughout the image. Struth’s street images speak of assorted activities, depicting the surfaces of capitalist society.

Struth’s museum scenes show crowds of people looking at works of art, studying exhibition brochures, or in conversation, duplicating exactly what the viewer is doing when they are confronted by the Struth photograph. His photographs conceptually order social spaces, whether in the museum, the city, churches, or private homes. Struth has said in an interview, “I am interested in how we have filled both our psychological and social space with images and information so that there is very little room for the self.”

Seriality becomes as important with Struth as it was with his mentors the Bechers. Struth’s photographic images created in all regions of capitalist society reflect each culture’s attitudes towards “texture and materials, towards space and efficiency, towards public life and history.”
The work of Thomas Demand goes beyond recording to the recreation of a personal space. Constructing paper life-size clinical rooms to photograph, Demand creates an almost claustrophobic effect in repetitive office spaces that offer no sense of scale. The viewer is presented with the image of another image, suggesting “History is the continuous accumulation of images.” Demand plays upon the constructs of photography, presenting artificially large prints extending off the two-dimensional wall into real space. Demand’s paper constructions are imperfect, calling upon the viewer to notice their artifice. Unlike his American predecessors, such as James Caseberre, who constructed miniature interiors, and Cindy Sherman’s staged settings, Demand is interested in “the sociological architectures that influence and mold the individual subject.”
Rochester Institute of Technology

When I came to RIT, I had decided that I wanted to photograph the insides of places I had presented as exteriors in Rhode Island. I wanted to show these homogenized spaces as I had "seen" them. I also switched from smaller 16" by 20" black and white fiber prints to much larger 30"X40" color prints. I had decided that color would add to the illusion of objectivity because our "reality" is color. Once considered suitable mostly in commercial settings, color photography has recently proven it's validity in the fine arts. "A second generation of color photographers," emerged during the 1970s to these photographers "color no longer has a decorative status, but is conceived instead as a natural quality of everyday experience." My thesis project, entitled Meeting Places shows parallels between the evolution of photo history and my own growth as a photographer.

Post-industrial society has developed a vernacular architecture that consists of: high quality but low maintenance finishes (brick, concrete, etc.), attractive and comfortable surroundings, and convenient access. An interest in these contrived constructions of culture fueled my exploration what has become our contemporary version of Main Street. Museums, coffeehouses, and arenas were my early choices of privately owned interior spaces designed for public use. These types of spaces had an obvious intended experience for the consumer reflected in object placement and the architecture's symbolic nature. The work evolved into images of places where the constructed experience was more subtle, allowing deeper introspection on the nature of our cultural experience within our environment.
Representational qualities became a subject matter of many photographs. An empty library and lecture hall became metaphors for the presentation of ideas. Empty classrooms symbolize a moment of calm which preceds thought or increased knowledge. My formal presentation of chalkboards suggests interaction with technology and the manifestation of post-modern ideas through older technology. The human relationship to technology thematically weaves itself through many of the images. The importance of objects in signifying intended purpose became more evident. At some point, the idea of the curator constructing a space became less interesting than my role as the photographer constructing experience through the representation of space. As my work has developed, the focus was shifted to places with less obvious signifiers.

Paul Virillo has said, "A landscape has no fixed meaning, no privileged vantage point. It is oriented only by the itinerary of the passerby." Searching for a way to represent the transience of modern life, the emphasis of my image making
was placed on ubiquitous, pedestrian spaces. I sought out spaces where a common experience occurs, but is not solely controlled by a “curator’s” intention. Parking garages, malls, offices, and hallways began to convey a universal experience. Even if you had not been to the exact location in the photograph, you have been to one that is similar to the point of being interchangeable in recollection. Evidence of human interaction or intervention became less obvious.
List of Images from

Meeting Places

Law Office. Rochester, NY.
Hallway Doors. Rochester, NY.
Curve Wall. Rochester, NY.
Shopping Mall. Rochester, NY.
Parking Garage. Rochester, NY.
Lobby. Rochester, NY.
Office Space. Rochester, NY.
Office Construction. Rochester, NY.
Reception Area. Rochester, NY.
Mailroom. Newark, NY.
Stairs. Rochester, NY.
Examination Room. Rochester, NY.
Architectural Model. Rochester, NY.
The Gallery entrance opens to a white wall. **Meeting Places** written over “Christine Holtz” in black type indicates the direction to enter. To the right, the first image *Law Office. Rochester, NY.* is followed by *Hallway Doors. Rochester, NY.* on the nearest wall. A long wall, observable when initially turning to enter supports four images, including *Curve Wall. Rochester, NY.* which is directly across from the viewer. It is followed by *Shopping Mall. Rochester, NY.* and *Parking Garage. Rochester, NY.* The final image on this wall is *Lobby. Rochester, NY.*

On the partition, most closely opposite the long wall, two images are presented: *Office Space. Rochester, NY.* and *Office Construction. Rochester, NY.* Following these, the eye likely is lead to *Reception Area. Rochester, NY.* and *Mailroom. Newark, NY.* which have been placed on a wall set back to allow access to more gallery space. The order of these four photos is less enforced by the architecture of the gallery and more open to the interpretation and interaction of the participant.
While the four images opposite the long wall are immediately noticeable upon turning, the final three photos are obstructed by partition. Only by walking around to the other open space can the viewer see these. After turning the corner, closest is *Stairs. Rochester, NY.* followed by *Examination Room. Rochester, NY.*

Finally, *Architectural Model. Rochester, NY.* is placed to the right of the exit/entrance. The circular design of the exhibit allows the viewer to contemplate *Architectural Model. Rochester, NY.* both as a single image and in conjunction with *Law Office. Rochester, NY.*, which appears on the left as the viewer faces the exit. Although this final image, *Architectural Model. Rochester, NY.*, is on the same wall as the first two images, it is separated from *Model. Rochester, NY.*, is on the same wall as the first two images, it is separated from them by the entrance, giving it the appearance of its own space and making it the only image not paired or grouped with others.
Figure 76. Curve Wall. Rochester, NY. 2001.

Figure 77. Hallway Doors. Rochester, NY. 2001.

Figure 78. Office Space. Rochester, NY. 2002.
The illusion of creating an objective photograph strengthens the viewer’s reaction to the images in *Meeting Places*. Photographic images have a power of documentation that endorses discussion when presented as a group. Placing my work in the framework of past photographers also enriches the substance of the work. As people interact with the photography, *Meeting Places* takes on added significance. Consider the idea of the viewer being introduced to the photograph as a human experience. Formal structures inherent to the medium of photography mediate these images of everyday scenes, raising questions concerning the interaction of space, the function of architecture, the subliminal effect of ordering, and ultimately, the nature of objectivity.

For a number of reasons, the reaction of the audience to the work is in many ways connected to their reaction to the architecture contained within the photographs. The use of formal structures inherent to photography reinforces the presentation of the work in the context of architectural photography. Lincoln Kirstein wrote in *American Photographs* “The facts of our homes and times, shown surgically, without the intrusion of the poet’s or painter’s comment, or necessary, distortion, are the unique contemporary field of the photographer.” It is photography’s natural impulse to collect information, as it inherently it records even the smallest details. Considered in this context, my work acknowledges a prolific amount of postmodern critique regarding the interaction of space, trends towards the standardization of architecture, and the pastiche. The printed photo is a unique tool of documentation because of the nature of the photographic emulsion. Silver prints made traditionally in the darkroom, instead of computer made digital prints, became an important element in this body of work because the viewer’s search for details is rewarded with information. I wanted to be more like Thomas Struth in forcing the viewers eye throughout the image, than Andreas Gursky, who stops the viewer at the surface.
The interaction of space is a theme that works on a variety of levels in *Meeting Places*. The spaces depicted reveal much to the careful observer about the postmodern function and conception of space. In our everyday interactions in public spaces, we take on roles as consumer, office worker, lawyer, postal worker, etc. The architecture itself creates signifiers reinforcing this role, as well as managing the space to create efficient transactions. The knowledgeable observer will notice some spaces are functionally designed to accommodate specific types of meetings while others have been assembled afterward for a specified effect. The level of preparation and arrangement of seating all signify the importance of the human interaction to take place.

The intended purpose of the waiting room, the storage room, or the workspace is revealed through the architectural structure and interior design. The actual interactions which have transpired are revealed by object placement, discarded items and evidence of activity.
The subtle evidence of human interaction references Raymond William’s *Structure of Feeling* where “... we are most aware of our “particular sense of life, our particular community.” When we notice the way that we are different from each other, even as we participate in a common culture.”

Favoring style, postmodern architecture embraces the pastiche as “blank parody”, often mixing or borrowing styles. Fredric Jameson wrote of the pastiche in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* the “eclecticism of postmodern architecture, which randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the architecture styles of the past and combines them in over stimulating ensembles.” When we assume a cultural attitude which takes things and uses them however we want, we pastiche them. Hal Foster writes, in his essay *Postmodern Polemics*, “For one thing, the use of pastiche in postmodern art and architecture deprives styles not only of specific context but also of historical sense: husked down to so many emblems, they are reproduced in the form of partial simulacra.”

Fredric Jameson writes, “ Appropriately enough, the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where the exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced.”

One example of the pastiche in *Meeting Places* is the open expanse of glass in *Law Office. Rochester, NY.* an architectural quotation of the Philip Johnson house in Connecticut. Johnson’s desire to create a living space without barriers to the scenic beauty of nature has been removed. The new purpose of this feature is to best display the status of the Law firm through the office’s elevation relative to the surrounding skyline. The impressive view with its implication of affluence and success, outweighs any other decorative signifier that could be used to convey status.
The most graphic symbol of the postmodern aesthetic, *Mailroom. Newark, NY.* reveals a maelstrom of replicated documents scattered about their creators. The initial view focuses on two stacks of collated papers, which lead the eye upward to the copier's visual interface screen. The human presence in the lower right is a blur in the photographic image, a cursory figure who has constructed these towers of documentation.

Jameson says that "Postmodernism presumably signals the end of the bourgeois ego," and with it "the end, for example of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of distinctive individual brush stroke as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction." My photography reflects this universal commercialization, as human experience becomes commodified through the proliferation of franchised architecture.

The images in *Meeting Places* were ordered to create a subliminal or implied narrative. By nature, a photographic series easily lends itself to the idea of a narrative. I enjoy the concept of a hidden narrative as a reflection of the willingness of the viewer to engage in the photos. The proliferation of drama in the mass media is a phenomenon sometimes lost on those embedded in the culture. Audiences socialized by television and cinema may reflexively assume some plot, even when presented with photographs where human interaction is not directly observed. Its not surprising the mind may suggest some narrative to cognitively unify the images presented to them. I worked on the placement of the first few photos to suggest a progression from one location to the next following someone's typical
daily sequence from law office, exiting through a double door to a hallway, then from the shopping mall to a parking garage. When viewed in this context, Examination Room. Rochester, NY., placed near the end, admittedly adds a dramatic element to the body of work; a moment out of the ordinary. The photo to it’s left, Stairs. Rochester, NY., leads the viewer to Examination Room. Rochester, NY. through the diagonals of the steps and banister. The transition image reinforces the physical narrative as if one leads to the other.

Architectural Model Rochester, NY., placed at the end of the exhibit provides a resolution to the climax of Examination Room. Alluding to both the work within itself as well as the work within different perspectives, this final image calls into question the nature of a series of photos as a narrative. This ending is reminiscent of a Shakespearean soliloquy such as at the end of The Tempest or Midsummer Nights Dream where the author questions the nature of the work in reality through the work itself as a closing contemplation.
Other factors that may contribute to the suggestion of a narrative or dramatic tension are equally absorbing. The dichotomy between architecture experienced through environmental interaction and architecture most often observed only through television or the movies also should be considered. While some locations will be frequented daily by most observers other locations, such as the law office, examination room, or presidents office, may be more familiar through television.

A series of images easily lends itself to interpretation as a sequence of events when intentionally ordered. The role of the camera’s lens in society as both the eye of truth in the context of photojournalism or television news and the eye of fantasy in the context of entertainment presents the audience with superficial classifications with which to judge an image. Aspects of *Meeting Places* challenge these judgements through both ordering and imagery.

The title *Meeting Places*, with its multiple connotations, adds to the dramatic tension. The formality and importance of a meeting may trigger a response based on past experience or societal expectations. The viewer’s subjective idea of what constitutes a meeting initially is strongly confirmed by the first image, *Law Office*. Every feature and object in the room reinforces the location as place where interactions of important business are attended. Besides the high quality table and chairs, the only objects visible are a phone and a teleconferencing device. The lack of ornamentation or extraneous objects adds strength to the panoramic view, highlighting the status and importance of the location.

![Image of Law Office in Rochester, NY](image-url)
While later images, such as *Reception Area* or *Lobby*, may also validate this initial notion of the meeting place, others challenge the idea. Areas architecturally unintended for human interaction take on an illicit or subversive characteristic when referenced as a meeting place. While the possibility of an informal meeting in a public place is suggested by *Shopping Mall. Rochester, NY.*, images like *Office Construction. Rochester, NY.* or *Parking Garage. Rochester, NY.* suggest either secretive meetings being held away from the designated public meeting centers or random encounters. These intentions provide dramatic counterpoint to the more formal and controlled settings such as in *Reception Area. Rochester, NY.*
Figure 99.

Figure 100.

Figure 101.
The flexibility of Meeting Places to function as postmodern cultural commentary while at the same time evoking emotions through a subliminal narrative or past experience speaks volumes on the objective quality of photography. The broader question of how much of culture is given and how much is created or constructed took on a duality when reflected though my photography; a physical simulation of the simulacra. My participation as a photographer working within the cultural landscape reflects a new set of questions regarding objectivity and verisimilitude.

William Jenkins writes that photographs can have “the appearance of no author” or “a stylistic decision... to lack style.” He goes on to caution that; “photography’s... pretense of truthfulness, its assertion of accuracy that gives it the ability to mislead so effectively.”34 Problematically, to believe that photographs have no author, a new sense of “objectivity” in the medium of photography, would have to be assumed by the viewer. For the creation of accurate documents, the viewer must come to the work believing that the role of the photographer is socially conscious.

Lewis Baltz has said “There is something paradoxical in the way that documentary photographs interact with our notions of reality...The ideal photographic document would appear to be without author or art. Yet of course photographs, despite their verisimilitude, are abstractions; their information is selective and incomplete.”35 The viewer’s subjective idea of what defines a meeting place provides a layer of opposition to the illusion of objectivity.
CONCLUSION

Can the photograph, with its inherent verisimilitude, create through the relationship of viewer and object a metaphor for the interaction of humans to contemporary architectural spaces? The relationship between art and observer as a metaphor for the relationship of people in their everyday environments is a reoccurring theme in my work. In my photographs of archetypal postmodern surroundings, I have worked to illuminate the construction of our experience through the representation of physical space. *Meeting Places* serves as a meeting point for audiences to interact with photographic images of their environments. The title, along with familiar visual signifiers in the photos, challenge the viewer to examining preconceived notions on different levels.

The verisimilitude of photography allows a seemingly objective image to make a subjective comment. Photography’s pretense is of actuality, truthfulness, or accepted fact. A manipulation of that sense of truth occurs when the photographic image is created. Photography’s semblance of truth creates a sense of objectivity through selectivity. Photographs document environments and experiences designed for transience and unthinking. Through my photographic process, I have transformed these mechanical, mundane occurrences into objects for contemplation and permanence.
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Endnotes

8 Griffin, 51.
10 Garrels, 3-4.
12 Garrels, 5.
13 Rian, 94.

17 Griffin, 51-52.
19 Burckhardt, 74.
20 Schorr, 84.
22 Alberro, 109.
23 Garrels, 108.
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Endnotes

24 Griffin, 52.
25 Ibid., 50.
28 Kirstein, 192.
32 Jameson, 18-19.
33 Ibid., 15.
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Bibliography


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