

**PETER HUJAR BEHIND THE CAMERA
AND IN THE DARKROOM**



GARY SCHNEIDER

Peter Hujar behind the camera and in the darkroom

GARY SCHNEIDER

FOR PETER

In 1976, I came to New York City from Cape Town, South Africa. Soon after I began doing technical work for Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater in Soho. John Erdman was performing. He was also performing for Yvonne Rainer, another of my heroes. John was, and still is, a great performer, and glamorous, and I fell in love. In 1977 we began our relationship. Through John I met Peter Hujar, who had been a close friend of his since 1969. Peter and I had an immediate rapport. I loved his work and was able to talk about photography and prints in a way that interested him. Shortly after meeting Peter he came to my performance, *Naming*, at Artists Space, an alternative exhibition space in Tribeca. It included an installation of my photographs. Peter was supportive of my work and the quality of my printing, and this further grew our relationship.

Working for the Theater didn't pay the rent, and since I already had a great interest in printing and had a facility for it, Peter suggested that he recommend me for a job at Klaus Moser photo lab. Klaus was an acquaintance of Peter's from his previous life as a photographer's assistant. Peter had assumed the role of mentor and I totally trusted him. I took the full-time job and discovered how much I enjoyed being in the darkroom. It was a perfect occupation for a dyslexic like me, and I remained there for three years. While there, with Klaus's permission, I took on artists' work, doing it after hours at the lab. That I became a darkroom person excited Peter.

Because of my obsessive nature, I became adept at processing film evenly edge to edge and drying it dust-free. The latter was tough for Peter, given his darkroom, which at that time was also his bathroom made dark with a black velvet curtain. I processed much of Peter's film from 1980 on because he didn't enjoy processing. I didn't make contact sheets for him until much later, he believed that making contact sheets was the beginning of the editing process. He preferred to review his work privately, making the decision whether a particular session was successful or not.

I realize now that from the beginning, Peter had a vision for my future photo lab. In 1981, John and I opened Schneider/Erdman. It was in our third-floor walk-up apartment at 54 St. Marks Place, in the East Village. The wet lab was in a 10x10 foot interior bedroom, with the dry lab in the living room and dining room. By 1983 the lab was fully established, and I was printing for many photographers. We needed more space and simply wanted to move the lab out of the apartment into a basement which was in a brownstone across the street. Peter convinced us that it wouldn't be big enough, and that we needed to expand. With his urging we moved the lab into a loft on Cooper Square, also in the East Village. Schneider/Erdman was essentially conceived and designed by Peter.

In 1982, Lisette Model was looking for a printer. Charles Atlas recommended me to Bruce Cratsley, who was working with Model at Marlborough Gallery. I was intimidated, and hesitated. Model was famously difficult. Peter knew Lisette and her work from Helen Gee's Limelight Gallery/Cafe in Greenwich Village, where the photo world hung out between 1954 and 1961, and where Lisette held court. Peter insisted that I had to do it—he wasn't going to let me pass up the opportunity to learn how to make a Lisette Model print. Of course, he also wanted me to share with him all that I would learn from printing Lisette's negatives, especially how she manipulated her prints to construct the narrative of the image, to control the progression of how the viewer reads the information in the print.

I later learned from Helen Gee that Lisette had originally printed her own work but abandoned it when Alexey Brodovitch, legendary art director of Harper's Bazaar, told her that her prints were too gray. To my eye, the prints that she had made are exquisitely tonal, it just wasn't fashionable at the time. Her prints were then produced with more contrast.

When I began working with Model she said:

"Dahling, you have to go to Washington to meet Gerd, he will teach you how to make my prints."

Gerd Sander, grandson of August Sander, a hero to Peter, had been her last printer. He was a great host and gave me the best advice: to never meet with Lisette without at least seven prints, each showing variant manipulations. This way, she would trust that I had done my work, and understood her image. He told me to show her the second-best print first and put the most resolved print in the middle of the pile. This way, when Lisette discovered it herself, she'd own the decision that it was the best print. This practice acknowledges the author's ownership of the most resolved print, and it builds trust that I understand their intention. Most often, she'd still send me back to the darkroom with further instructions on the prints.

These were the great lessons in how to discover the desire of the artist. To me, the artist's intention is all that matters. My job, and my talent, is to not interfere but rather to facilitate. To illustrate this, we had a constantly changing exhibition of framed printer's proofs installed on the long wall at the entrance to the lab. Peter visited often, announcing on the intercom that it was John Szarkowski, the senior curator of photography at MoMA, and who was indifferent to his work. Peter had a wry sense of humor. He always studied the prints and loved to discuss each artists' ideas, paper and scale choices.

The Schneider/Erdman archive, including the papers and all the printer's proofs—more than 450—was acquired by Harvard Art Museums between 2011 and 2016. It includes prints by a range of artists including Nan Goldin, Lisette Model, Richard Avedon, James Casebere, Gilles Peress, Ari Marcopoulos, John Schabel, Robert Gober, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Eric Fischl, Laurie Simmons, Alexander Hammid, Matthew Barney, Lorna Simpson, David Wojnarowicz, Peter Hujar, and a portfolio of abstractions by twelve Czech Modernists. An exhibition and book, *Analog Culture*, as well as a special collections website were produced in 2018.

JOHN ERDMAN AND GARY SCHNEIDER AT MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE, 1984

Peter turned 50 in 1984. There was an extraordinary birthday bash for him at Area, a club in Tribeca. The huge number of people that showed up surprised us, they all seemed to know him. The only other time I remember such an event dedicated to Peter was his Gracie Mansion Gallery opening party in 1986. It was in the Mike Todd VIP room at Palladium, on 14th Street. What I remember most, besides the huge turnout, was the massive Basquiat mural above the bar.

Around this time I started making some of his contact sheets. By then Peter was impressed with my ability to channel the desires of the artists I was working for, and he talked about grooming me to eventually take over his printing. This happened all too soon.

As a birthday present John and I gave Peter a trip to Mohonk Mountain House. The Smiley family was still running it, and it was a rambling, slightly seedy, one hundred and fifty-year-old Victorian hotel, and a wonderful retreat. It is nestled at the edge of a lake, on the top of a mountain, surrounded by walks through pine forests with magical vistas of valleys and other peaks. John and I would sometimes go there for an all-inclusive overnight stay. It was inexpensive with very lax rules. Each meal was all you could eat. We'd arrive early in the morning, slip into breakfast, and stay till after lunch the next day.

Though it was the dead of winter, we spent the whole time outdoors with Peter. Throughout the day he encouraged us, once again, to increase the scale of the lab, he had definite ideas about how to make a business function. Though we were a sought-after lab, John and I knew nothing about business, and we were already working 13 hour days. Peter punctuated his advice by having us hug pine trees, because, he said, they imparted positive energy. However, he kept returning to the subject of the lab. This upset John. Peter could be very persistent if he thought you weren't seeing the light. By dinner time we were exhausted.

He photographed us here in the anteroom to the dining room, waiting for the doors to open.

John and I talked through the night. On the way back to the city, the next day, we made a proposal to Peter. We were overwhelmed with work. We offered him a one-third partnership if he'd become another printer in the lab. He warmed to the idea and said he would give it a try. Promptly at 9 a.m. the next day he arrived. He and I discussed which job he should start with. We decided on Mary Ellen Mark's reproduction prints, since she printed on his paper, Agfa Portriga Rapid III. Also, her negatives had a very full tonal range and once the density and contrast were reached, with some manipulations, the images pretty much printed themselves.

After two hours, there was a loud animal cry, then an equally loud crash. I came out of my darkroom to see him leaving. I then discovered he had put his fist through the darkroom door. Days later he was remorseful, he apologized and admitted how difficult it was to print someone else's work. He commiserated with us—and he finally stopped spurring us on to more and more.



Peter trained me in many ways. He was always pushing to make me a wiser printer, and I was hungry for these exchanges. We went to many exhibitions. He was interested which paper the photographers had chosen, and brilliant at speculating how another photographer manipulated their prints in the darkroom to interpret the image.

For our barter, for processing his film, he would give us prints and allowed me to choose the print I wanted. I would also assist him in selecting prints for his exhibitions, and I'm sure other friends did too. I loved this process, and he knew he could do it with me ad nauseam. I'd go to his loft, and he would lay out all the prints of an image on the floor. He'd describe why he made various choices. We would discuss what made one print more eloquent than another. He would describe why he made certain areas of the print darker or lighter, and where he had bleached a detail to make it more contrasty and harsher, and why he retouched certain elements, after the print was dry. One of the toughest decisions to be considered was whether to use a softer, grade 2 paper, or harder, grade 3 paper. He would sometimes print an image on both grades and we'd examine the success of each version. Often the differences between prints could be dramatic, especially if he was experimenting with two paper grades, and sometimes the differences were very subtle. He'd say:

"I wish I could print that area on a grade 5 and this area on a zero."

There were papers that could do that. Ilford and Kodak made good multiple contrast papers, but Peter didn't print on them. He was very attached to the eccentric tonality of Agfa Portriga Rapid 111.

His decisions were always in the service of refining the meaning of the images, rather than in an effort to simply make more beautiful tones. The story he wanted to tell was what the subject meant to him. If it was a portrait, and this included the animal portraits, he explored what the subject was thinking and feeling. If it was a still life or architecture, he explored his personal relationship to that subject. Even though Peter made iconic images that we can easily recognize, he wasn't interested in making the full reading of the image easy. He worked very hard to control the speed at which the image reveals itself to the viewer by controlling, as it was with Lisette, the progression with which we see the details in the image. Each print tells its story at a different speed, while allowing the relationship to the subject to remain visibly complex. John and I live with many of his prints, his work never disappears. Each time you view it, the image once again reveals itself, giving you an opportunity to explore its meaning in a new way.

He believed that someday his printing would become an important aspect of his legacy as an artist. He often said that when he finally became famous, scholars would study the differences between his prints of the same image. In an attempt at controlling this future study, Peter, before he died, enlisted Lynn Davis to help him destroy prints that he decided were not worth saving, or were too incomplete to convey the narrative.

WILL SHAR-PEI (I), 1985

After his AIDS diagnosis in January 1987, Peter never went back into the darkroom. He might have been worried that the chemistry would affect his immune system, and he was certainly very depressed. He had me print for him until his death in November the same year.

Peter asked me to print an edition of one image to be given as gifts to the numerous doctors he was seeing and whom he was unable to pay. It was the first time I was to print an edition for him, and it was the very first time he made a complete edition of an image—a fraught situation for Peter. He decided on *Will Shar-Pei (I)*, 1985, which he had exhibited in his 1986 Gracie Mansion show. Sensitive and very carefully, I proofed it as many times as he needed, until he was happy. I presented the 10 prints plus one printer's proof to him. When he saw them, his face went ashen and the pile of prints dropped from his hands to the floor. Seeing a complete edition of an image at one time was a shock, and essentially against his religion. He did however recover from the shock, and fortunately the prints were not damaged.

In 2008, more than 20 years after Peter's death, there was a high demand for prints of images that were no longer available. The Peter Hujar Archive and I began making posthumous prints. When I'm working on an image I study as many lifetime prints as I can find from the Archive, good book reproductions, auction previews, collections, and my collection. I also use as guides prints of other Hujar images to compare to the print I'm working on for color possibilities. Hujar prints may appear to be black and white, but Peter experimented with selenium toning making the highlights warmer and the shadows cooler. I must find a way to make finished prints without losing the eccentricities of a Hujar print. I expand on this when writing about *Boys in Car, Halloween*, 1978.

There is an evolution in Peter's printing style over the decades. His prints from before his only lifetime monograph, *Portraits in Life and Death*, 1976, are often printed contrasty. There are very strong, graphic blacks and some paper whites with no or very little detail. All the prints he made are good, but the style he tutored me in was the later, more tonal printing style. To confuse the issue, there can be later images printed in his earlier, more contrasty manner as well as the more tonal—this was usually the result of him experimenting with two paper grades.

Agfa Portriga Rapid 111, Peter's paper, went out of production in 1987, the year he died. The toxic cadmium used in the production of the paper no longer met EPA standards. It was a very popular paper, used by many photographers, because it had infinite printing versatility. In 2008, I produced a gelatin silver print on a contemporary paper, but the result couldn't reproduce Peter's singular tonal choices. To make prints that could sit alongside his in an exhibition, it is necessary to print them digitally using pigmented ink. Peter's negatives are scanned by Tom Hurley, at Laumont Photographics, who has great sensitivity to the work. I can then produce prints with infinite control over tonality and color. It still can take months for me to arrive at a final version of a Hujar print. I make one print at a time, as he taught me. This way, the process of exploration can continue. This keeps the prints alive, so that, like his, there are subtle variations from print to print. Peter said often:

"No two prints need to match, but all the prints need to function."



PRINTING *BOYS IN CAR, HALLOWEEN, 1978*

In this section I will explore how Peter shifts what he saw in the camera by manipulating the negative in the darkroom, to arrive at how he wants us to experience the image when looking at the print. I was with Peter when he made this photograph on Halloween night in 1978.

In 2020, I printed a new posthumous edition of it. I was lucky to have a vintage print which had belonged to Vince Aletti to use as a guide.

New York City was Peter's playground. Often when Peter and I went out walking, he would have me be the eyes in the back of his head. The city was a desperate place in the seventies and early eighties, and as tall and strong as Peter was, he was still vulnerable while photographing. With his head bent forward, he could only see what was showing on the ground glass of his Roliflex camera. The most memorable of these outings were the annual Halloween Parades and the sex piers along the Hudson River.

For the latter, my most vivid memory was when he set up the camera on a tripod to photograph himself having sex. To take the shot, he'd set a timer on a short cable release dangling from his camera. I was there to protect the camera. I never clicked the shutter for any of Peter's photographs, even when he was photographing himself.

Peter and I never had sex, even though we might have, given the sexual openness of the period and the closeness of our relationship. We would never have done that—it would have upset John.



THE NEGATIVE

This is a night photograph in which Peter, using an on-camera flash, managed to get detail in the shadow areas without making the highlights too dense. Too dense would be a loss of detail. All the areas that look black in a negative will be the highlights in the print. Peter was technically expert at exposing film, so that his negatives generally have full tonality, often with far more detail than he shows in his final prints.



THE POSITIVE

This is the inverse of the negative and I'm showing it here without any manipulation—burning, dodging, or cropping. Peter very seldom printed an image with this kind of grayness. The closest he came to this was with *Greer Lankton's Legs*, 1983.

He framed the two men very carefully, employing his usual center framing. Their eyes are making real contact with him, without looking self-conscious.

It is a powerful image, and it works very well even as we see it here, but Peter wanted to control how the image is read. He manipulated the negative a great deal in the darkroom to interpret what we are seeing.



THE CROPPED IMAGE

Cropping the image is one of the tools Peter used to create the narrative. I am showing the full frame with a thin white line to show what he cropped. This makes the two men larger in the frame. He cropped in from the left-hand side and also cropped the bottom edge of the frame. He crops as little as possible from the right-hand edge, which makes the passenger slightly less centered, and gives more presence to the driver. Peter knows we will always see the passenger first, but he needs to make certain that the driver is also given importance. He slightly rotates the image clockwise so that the two men are more vertical. Because of this cropping, the passenger's elbow becomes more present.

Peter still maintains the square format of the negative.

Until around 1975, he printed his images without cropping, showing the black of the negative frame, that we see here. He had made a hand-filed negative carrier so that when he printed his images, the rough black-border was particular to him. By using a black border, he was telling us that we were seeing the full image he was seeing in the camera. For *Portraits in Life and Death*, 1976, he began cropping some of the images, but he was still using his old negative carrier so that some of the edges have light bouncing into the image, causing these areas to become slightly darker. He later replaced this negative carrier to control it.



CONTRAST

The image is not yet manipulated in the darkroom, except for a change in contrast, making the overall image brighter and darker. Peter did this by choosing a particular grade of paper, Agfa Portriga Rapid III, grade 2.

As a result, the driver is now darker and recedes into the background. The passenger dominates the frame more because his highlights become lighter and brighter. We've all but lost the steering wheel and most of the car's interior. The whole situation is looking less benign—Peter has only begun to edit the information we see.



THE FINAL PRINT

To achieve his visual narrative, Peter focused much of his attention here on the driver. His face and bandana are dodged, making them lighter. Dodging is holding back light in a particular area of the print. The brightness, or contrast, of his face, bandana, and hat, are increased by controlled bleaching of those areas. Bleaching is achieved by very controlled painting of the area with a potassium ferricyanide solution, using a small brush. The driver now proceeds and is more present.

Both men are now more in balance, in fact we almost see the driver first. Not an easy feat since the passenger's elbow is so dominant, and he is still pretty much center-framed, and proceeding forward out of the picture plane. The composition remains dynamic.

In 2020, when I made the posthumous print of this image, I discovered there were several manipulations of the passenger that I had to do to make the driver more present and arrive at Peter's final tonal composition. He added a little more detail to the passenger's t-shirt and Panama hat to contrast with the car detailing. His arms and neck are made slightly darker by burning in—adding more light to make an area darker. He also makes the passenger's elbow slightly more similar tonally to the rest of the man's arm. These manipulations made the passenger more enclosed by the frame.

The right-hand edge of the car detailing is left alone because it's important to define the edge of the frame to enclose the figures.

He next toned the print with selenium for storage stability, which shifted the color slightly, making the shadows cooler than the highlights and adding density and richness to the blacks. This adds to the print's graphic presence. He then washed and dried the print.

He often did an enormous amount of retouching on his prints once they were dry. He removes what he considers distractions in the print, by reducing or eliminating certain highlights and speculars that draw the eye. Speculars are paper white. Bright light is reflecting, from the camera flash, off surfaces and onto the film, and they are too dense on the negative to have tone. He uses black ink (spottone) and a fine sable hair brush to paint out the speculars on the steering wheel, and the highlights on the seat behind the passenger. He leaves alone those on the car roof, sun visor, the rear-view mirror, and the car detailing. All these decisions keep us focused on the two men. Peter doesn't spot out the scar on the passenger's elbow. It's distracting, but these are details that he valued highly.



BEING PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER IN HIS STUDIO

This 1979 portrait session took place in Peter's East Village loft. As with most of his studio portrait sessions, he simply photographed me on his gray concrete floor against the white wall, sometimes with the chair he often used. For this session he used a studio strobe mixed with ambient light from his large east-facing windows. For some frames he used the strobe to fill in the shadow cast by the window light. Sometimes, he wouldn't use the strobe so that there would be a strong shadow on the right-hand side of the figure. He might even add light to the left-hand side to make that shadow even more graphic.

Nowhere in this session did Peter use a tripod. He was hand-holding his Rolleiflex camera, which allowed him to adjust his shifting point of view, so he could easily recompose the image. His body language caused a particular relationship to me while he was photographing. He is moving around me to make the images—it felt like a dance between the two of us.

I first presented this as a talk at the Morgan Library in 2018, and in 2019 at the Jeu de Paume in Paris. Both occasions were Peter's survey exhibition, "Peter Hujar: Speed of Life". In 2022 I revisited the talk at Between Bridges in Berlin to celebrate the third printing of *Peter Hujar's Day, 2021*, a transcribed conversation Peter and his friend Linda Rosenkranz recorded in 1974.

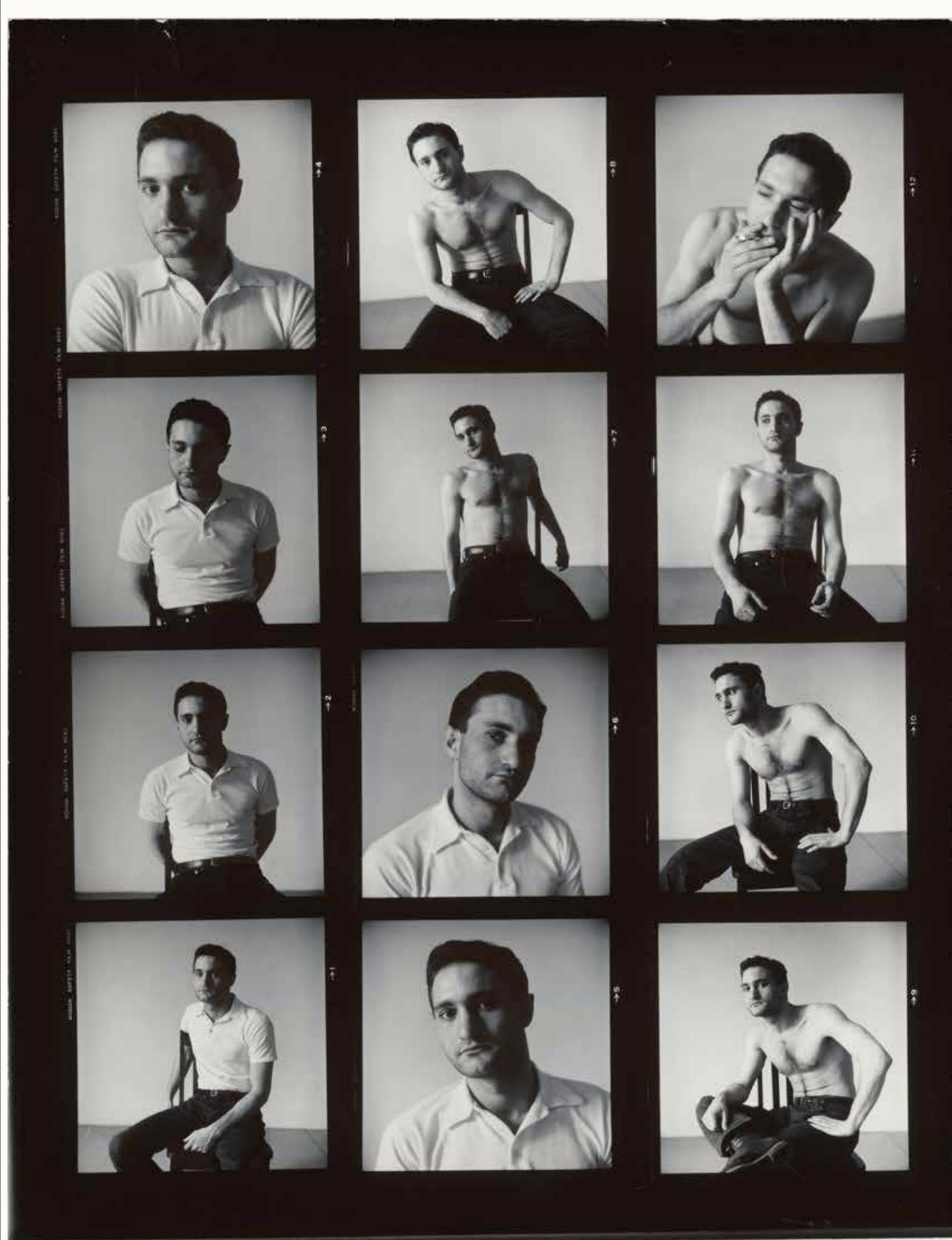
I looked at the contact sheets to trigger memories of the session itself, and conversations I had with Peter during and afterwards.

The rolls are laid out the same on all the contact sheets. The first frame on a roll (bottom left) is numbered #1, and the last frame (top right) is #12, so that you can easily reference the order in which the frames were shot.

ROLL 1

I am mostly clothed. Self-conscious of the camera, I'm making poses for Peter that I knew from Hujar images I was familiar with. I knew his work well by this time.

Peter wasn't directing me.

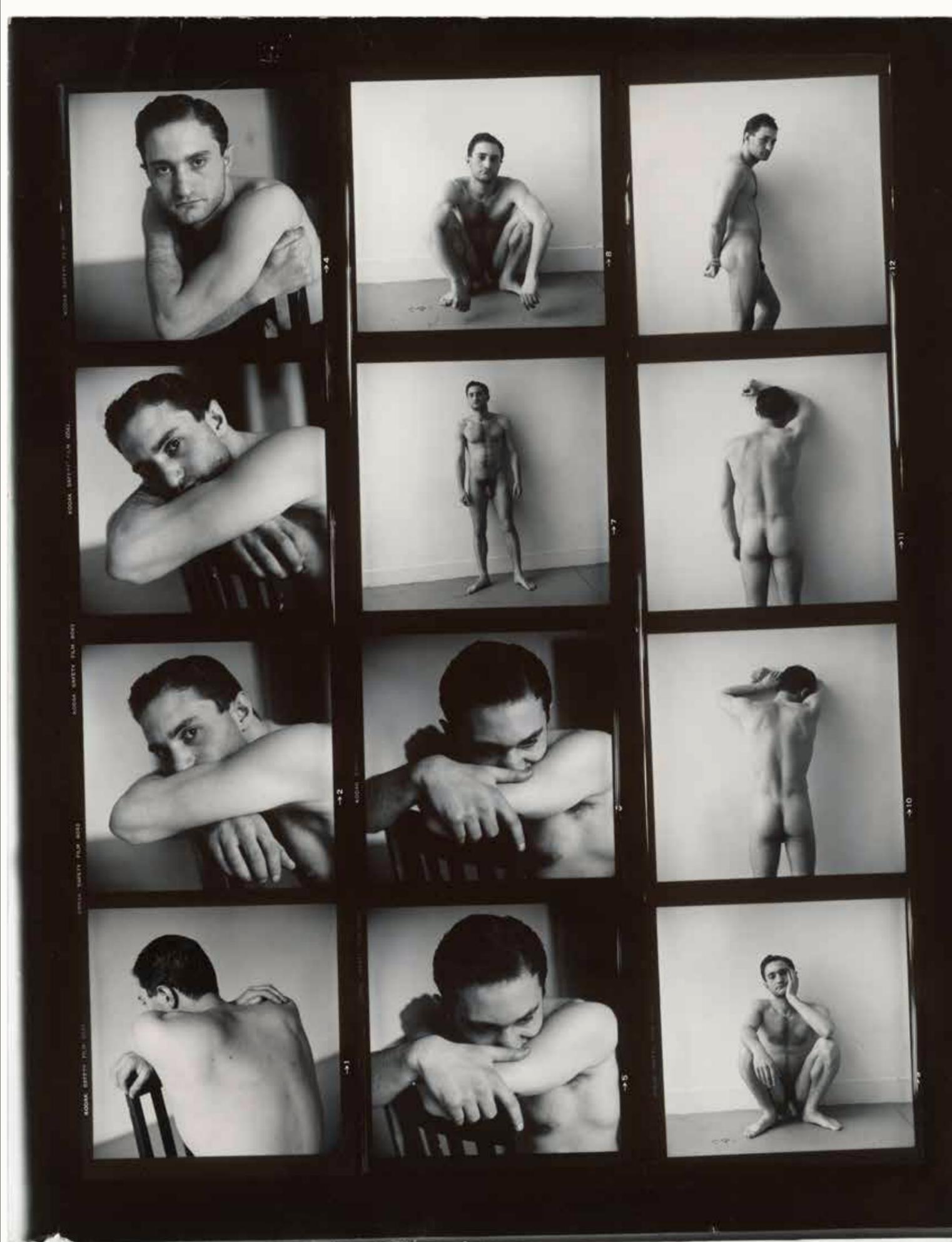


ROLL 2

I have discarded my clothes for roll 2. Peter might have suggested that I be naked. He knew I was comfortable with this; he had seen my naked performance at Artists Space two years earlier.

Peter begins the roll photographing my back in frame #1, and rather than ask me to move, he moves around me and loses the studio wall as the background so that we now see some of the shadowy entrance to his loft in the frame. He attempts to make a portrait of me but I am still too self-conscious. It's only when I drop my gaze that he finds the image.

If there are two similar frames, he often selects the first frame. It is in the discovery of the event by Peter that makes the image more successful. He printed frame #5.



GARY SCHNEIDER, 1979



ROLL 3

I still seem to be uncomfortable in front of the camera, but as the roll progressed, by frame #12, I'm beginning to become more relaxed and I'm sitting on the chair.

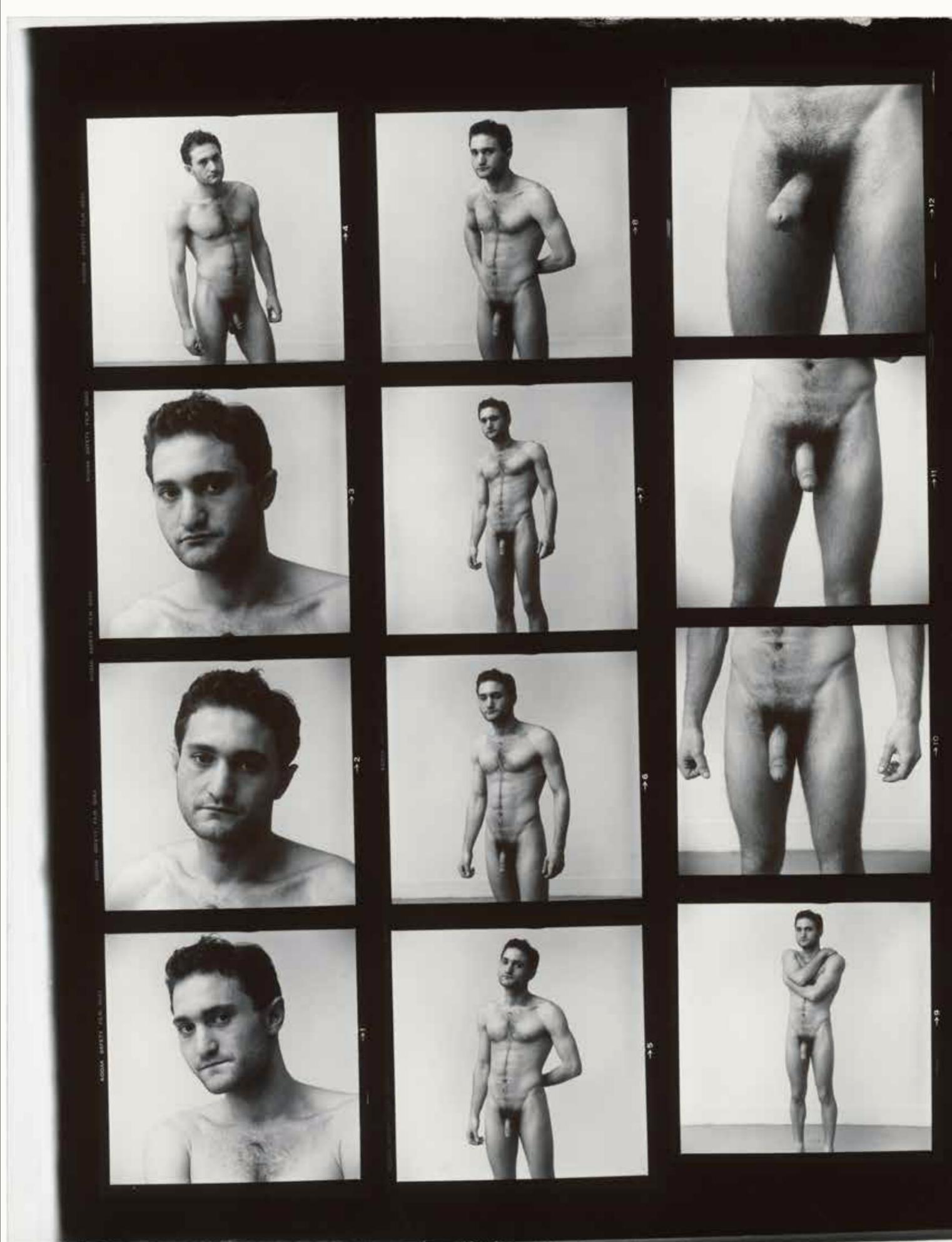
Even though there is not much happening, Peter was photographing slowly in roll 3. When I talk about slowly, it is in relation to other photographers who would be exposing many rolls of a single setup, with very little difference from frame to frame. In this roll, Peter was photographing even too fast for him, and he doesn't find a frame to print.



ROLL 4

Even though I'm still not doing much more than in roll 3, I'm certainly relaxing much more. Peter and I weren't talking very much during these rolls. At the beginning of this roll, I'm still seated, and he comes close for a portrait. Peter asked me to stand and I'm feeling vulnerable, but also excited by being scrutinized. He catches me just as he notices that my shyness is being replaced by a sexual charge. I'm finally connecting with him, and my nakedness is beginning to excite me.

I'm in the zone with him in roll 4 and he made a print of frame #8.



GARY SCHNEIDER STANDING NUDE, 1979



ROLL 5

Peter photographed slowly, deliberately, calmly. There are delays between rolls, as well as between frames, in which we were talking about what is happening in the session, but again he's not directing me.

In roll 5 it is easy to read what I am thinking.

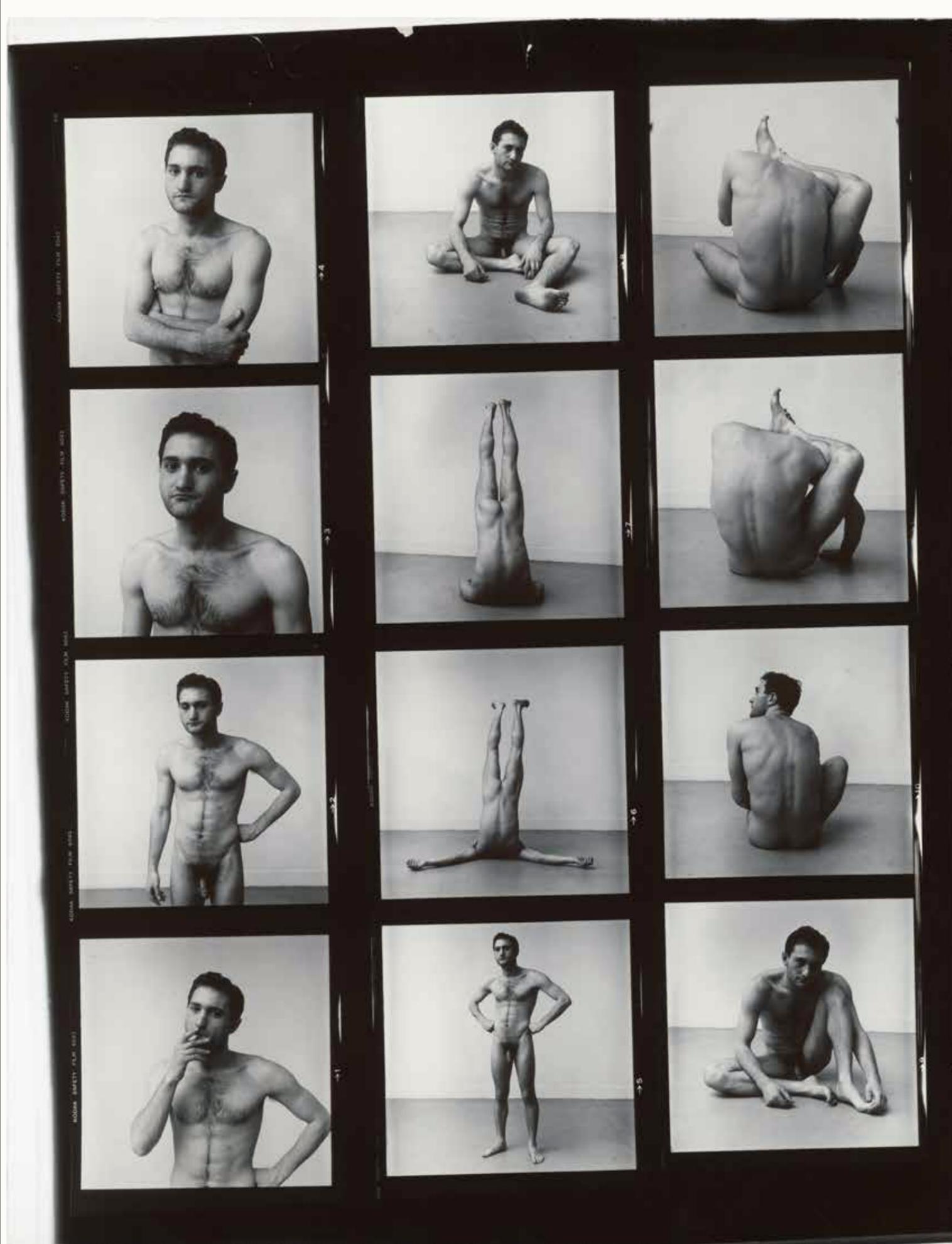
I must have lit a cigarette while he was changing rolls of film, and I'm still taking a smoke break in frame #1.

Peter believed he had gotten a portrait in rolls 2 and 4, and now he's wanting to try something different. I am self-consciously thinking about it and working it out from frame #2 through frame #5. I decide to do yoga poses. In frames #6 and #7 I've tried something that I didn't feel right about, and he wasn't interested in.

I knew he was waiting for me to do something because I could sense his energy and focus. In frame #8 I'm thinking about this, trying to work it out. By frame #9 I'm picking my toenail, still thinking, and frustrated.

I wanted to show off for Peter, to please him. In frame #10 I have an idea for a new pose, and by frames #11 and #12 I start the new pose.

After we finish this roll Peter told me that he liked the last pose I had attempted in frame #12, at the end of the roll.



ROLL 6

I continued exploring the pose I had begun at the end of roll 5. Roll 6 is successful for Peter and he prints frames #3 and #7.

These two frames are about shape. I'm in a place of stillness, and so is he. We are in sync.

These qualities aren't in the earlier yoga poses frames. These images are more abstract, since there is no face.

By the end of the roll in frame #12, Peter attempts another close-up portrait. Peter knew me well. I am a pretty anxious person, and by now I am very much slowed down, and totally in the zone with him. He would have fully noticed this shift in me and taken advantage of it to attempt another close-up portrait.



GARY SCHNEIDER IN CONTORTION (11), 1979

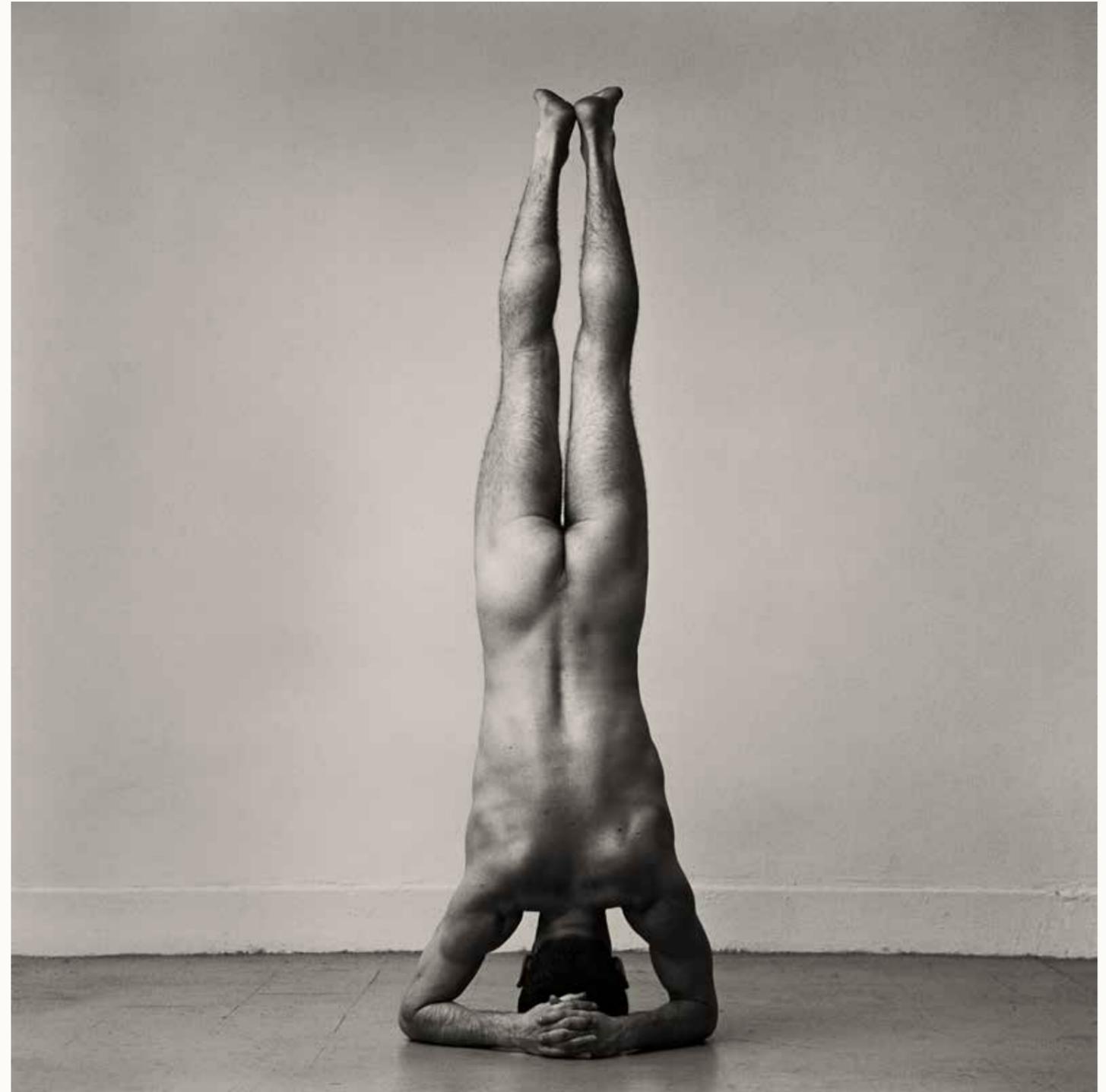
This is a still life. It is center-framed, and the shape is the most contained of the various frames of this pose.

It is monumental. Peter achieved this by lowering himself close to the floor and framing the body, so that he's in a one-to-one relationship to it. He's looking directly at it and slightly up at me.

He later said that it feels like an Edward Weston pepper. Peter could be very funny.



GARY SCHNEIDER DOING HEADSTAND, 1979



ROLL 7

Roll 7 is the last roll.

I'm feeling full of myself, and I attempt another portrait in frame #1, a pose I knew well from his self-portrait, and the Susan Sontag portrait, both included in *Portraits in Life and Death*.

I quickly felt ridiculous, and immediately in frame #2, out of sheer embarrassment that I am making that iconic Hujar pose, I pushed up into a bridge, another yoga pose.

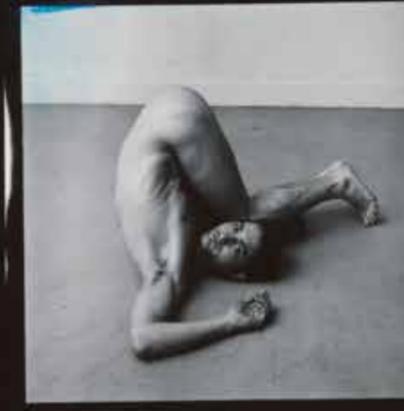
In frame #3 Peter is looking at me, slightly from above. He was a full head taller than me, so he had to crouch down slightly.

In frame #4 I have put my arm down for support, and Peter needs to accommodate this arm and hand, so he tilts the camera down and crouches more. We see a bit more floor.

In frame #5 Peter moves closer to me by crouching further to the floor to become more intimate with me. We see even more floor.

Frame #6 is the only frame marked with a grease pencil in the entire portrait session. I am fully aware of him and we're again in sync.

Both John and I remember looking through contact sheets with Peter. Sometimes there was a grease-penciled frame that he felt was the key image, even though he might never print it. He said it was his way to remember his first response to a session.



Frame #6 is very quiet. Peter is in a similar position to frame #5, but we see even more floor. Now I turn to see him. He chooses that exact moment of eye contact, and he clicks the shutter.

Below is how Peter saw this image while he was working. He was looking down at the ground glass of his Rolleiflex camera, which was gridded like this, and would have shown him the image, the same size as the negative, and reversed. Peter is very carefully composing on the ground glass.

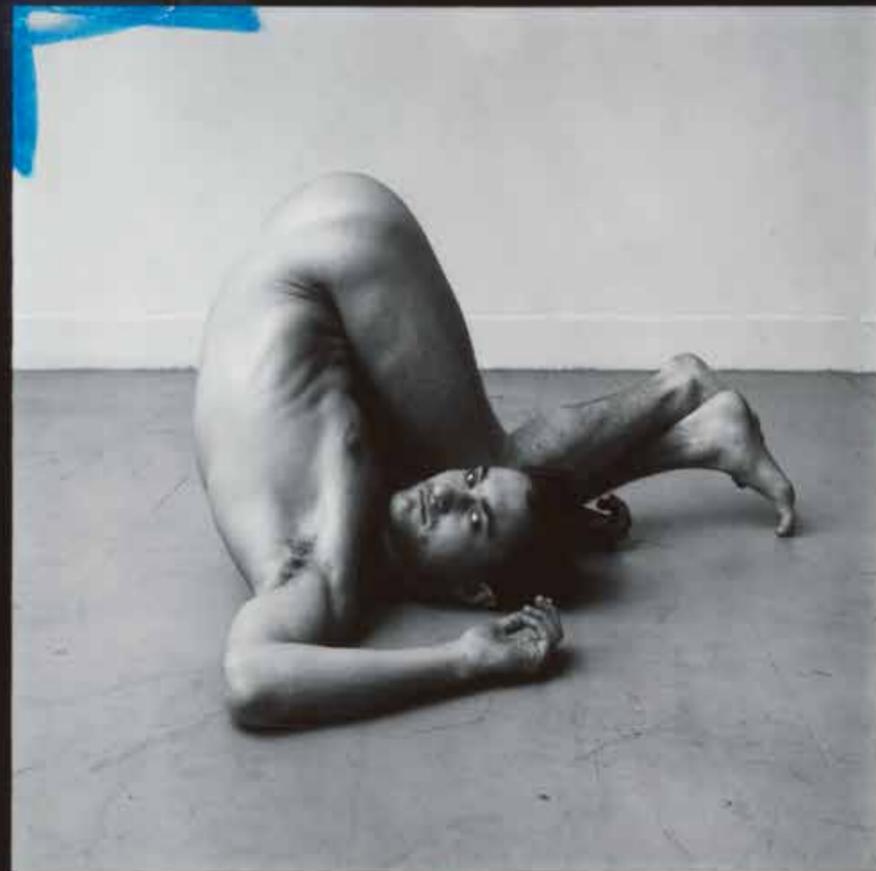
Using the grid, Peter made the horizon level where the floor hits the wall. He has centered the figure in the frame. The space from the top of the figure to the top frame edge is like the space from my back to the left-hand frame edge, and there is a similar space from my elbow to the bottom frame edge. He also placed my eyes within the center square. He has taken a long time to compose, while crouching.



In frame #7 Peter is beginning to stand up and hover over me. He frames me with more floor showing, and with my face much less in profile than in frame #6. He has moved away from the careful center framing and horizon line. It is now less a still life and more a portrait.

My gaze has shifted so that I am now confronting the camera more directly. This is because I am following Peter's movements with my eyes. The difference between frame #6 and frame #7 is the shift in my gaze coupled with the shift in Peter's point of view, or camera angle. I began to find him in frame #6 and in frame #7 I had found him, and I hold this gaze.

Peter originally marked frame #7 as the select and then changed his mind, partially erasing the grease pencil. You see the remnants of it in the top left-hand corner.



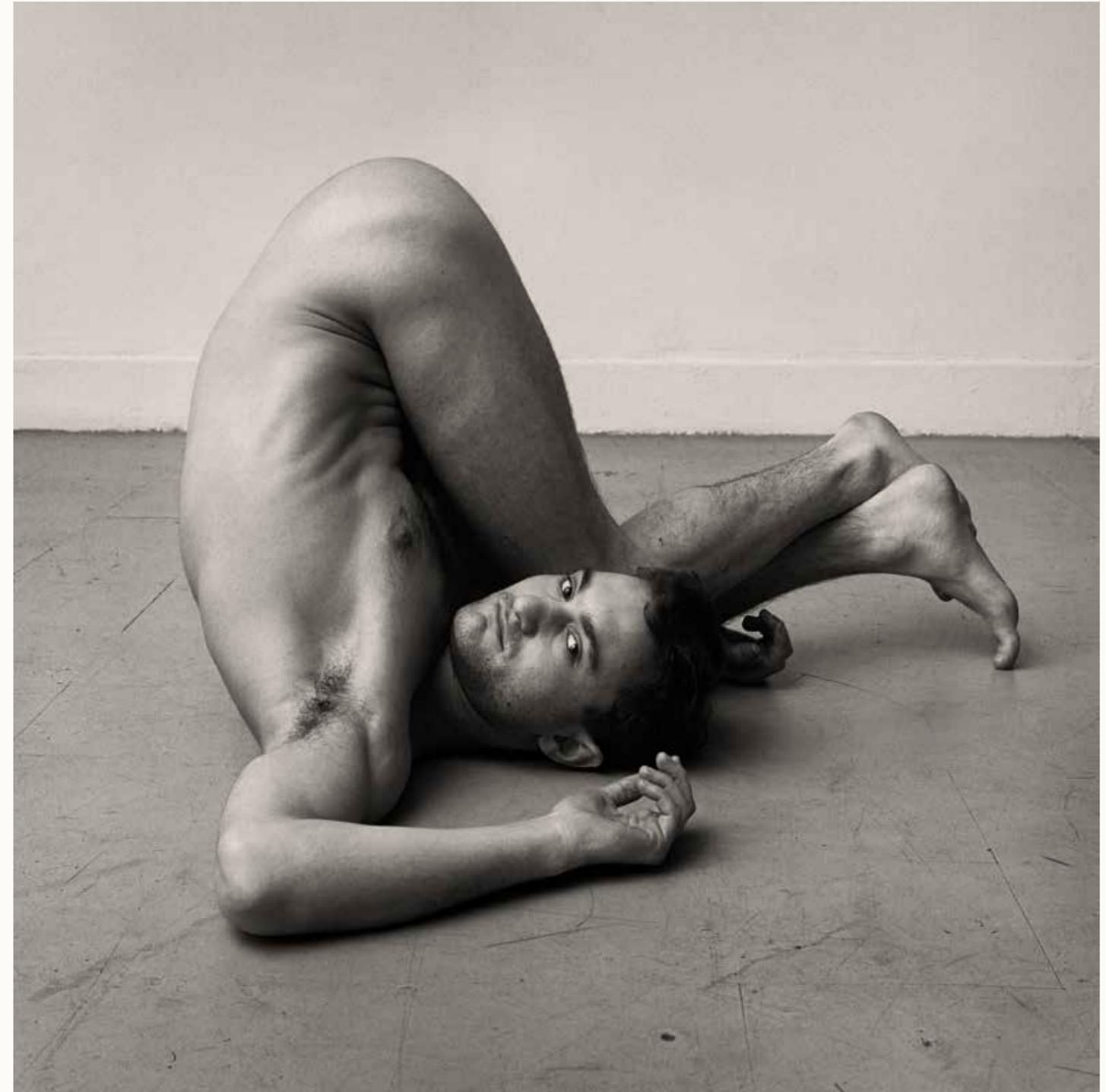
GARY SCHNEIDER IN CONTORTION (1), 1979

Frame #6 is the select. It is a complex Hujar photograph. It is both a portrait and a still life.

Peter's portraits are enigmatic in that you can often feel the person thinking. They are at once internal and external. In this frame, I am more introspective than in frame #7. He caught the exact moment of transition between me focused inside my body, making this contortion, and once I had found it, searching to find him. I have almost not found him yet.

Peter and I both had now become fully present and at rest.

The session ended. Peter didn't even expose frame #12 on this roll. He knew he had his photograph, and he was done.



PHOTOGRAPHING IN STUYVESANT PARK, 1981

It was the summer of 1981. We went on one of our night walks. Peter wanted to photograph in Stuyvesant Park, located on 15th Street and 2nd Avenue, just three blocks north of his loft. It was the nearest cruising park to where he lived in the East Village. This was his neighborhood place, a very small park, just two blocks long by one short block deep, surrounded by residential buildings. He wanted to experiment with using only the ambient light of the park lamps. In those days it was quite desolate and somewhat sinister at night. This place was for picking up men—not for public sex.

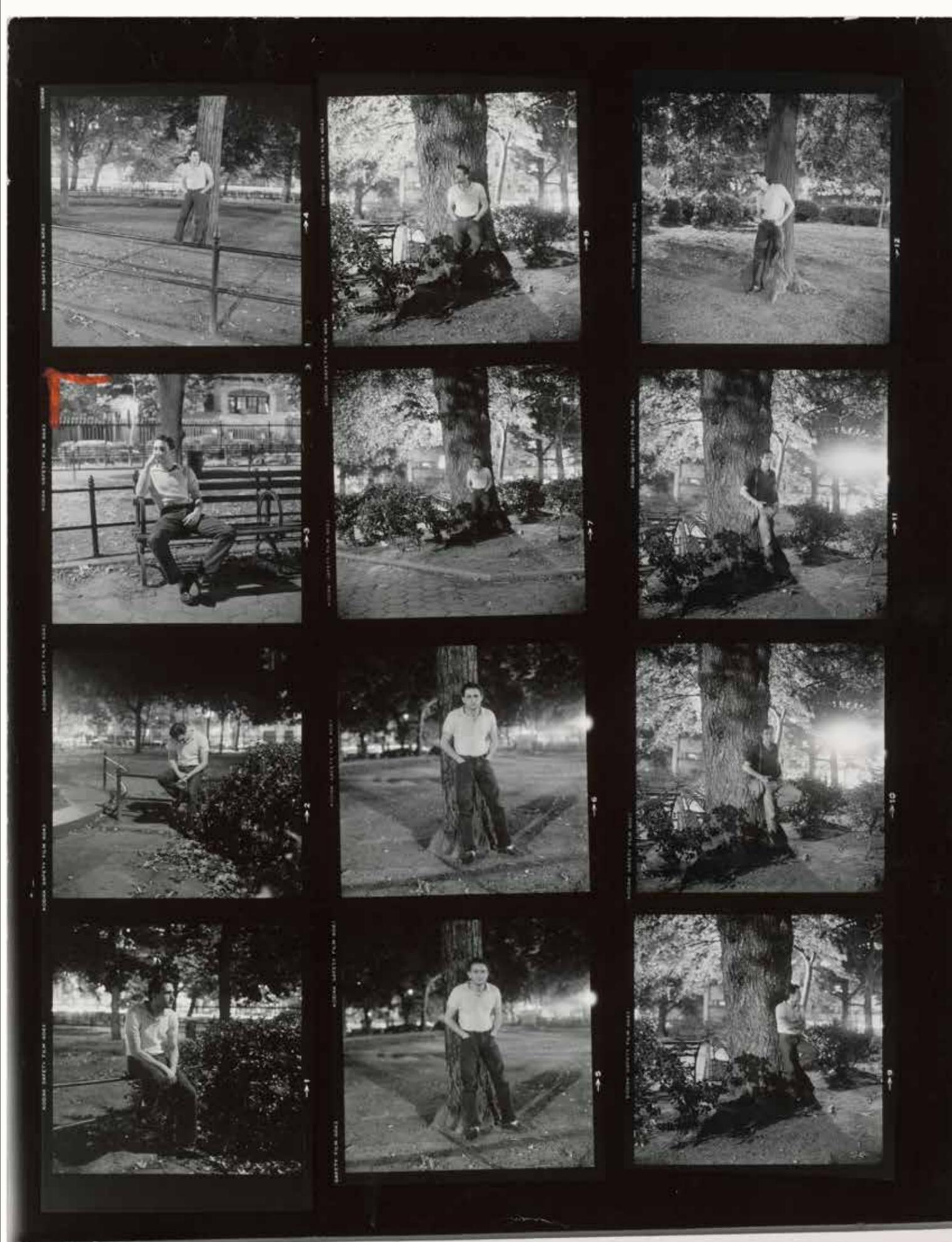
I have vivid memories of that night. Peter was in a wonderful mood. He had photographed David Wojnarowicz and George Stoll earlier that evening and he was excited by this new relationship with David. He was also infectiously horny that evening.

ROLL 1

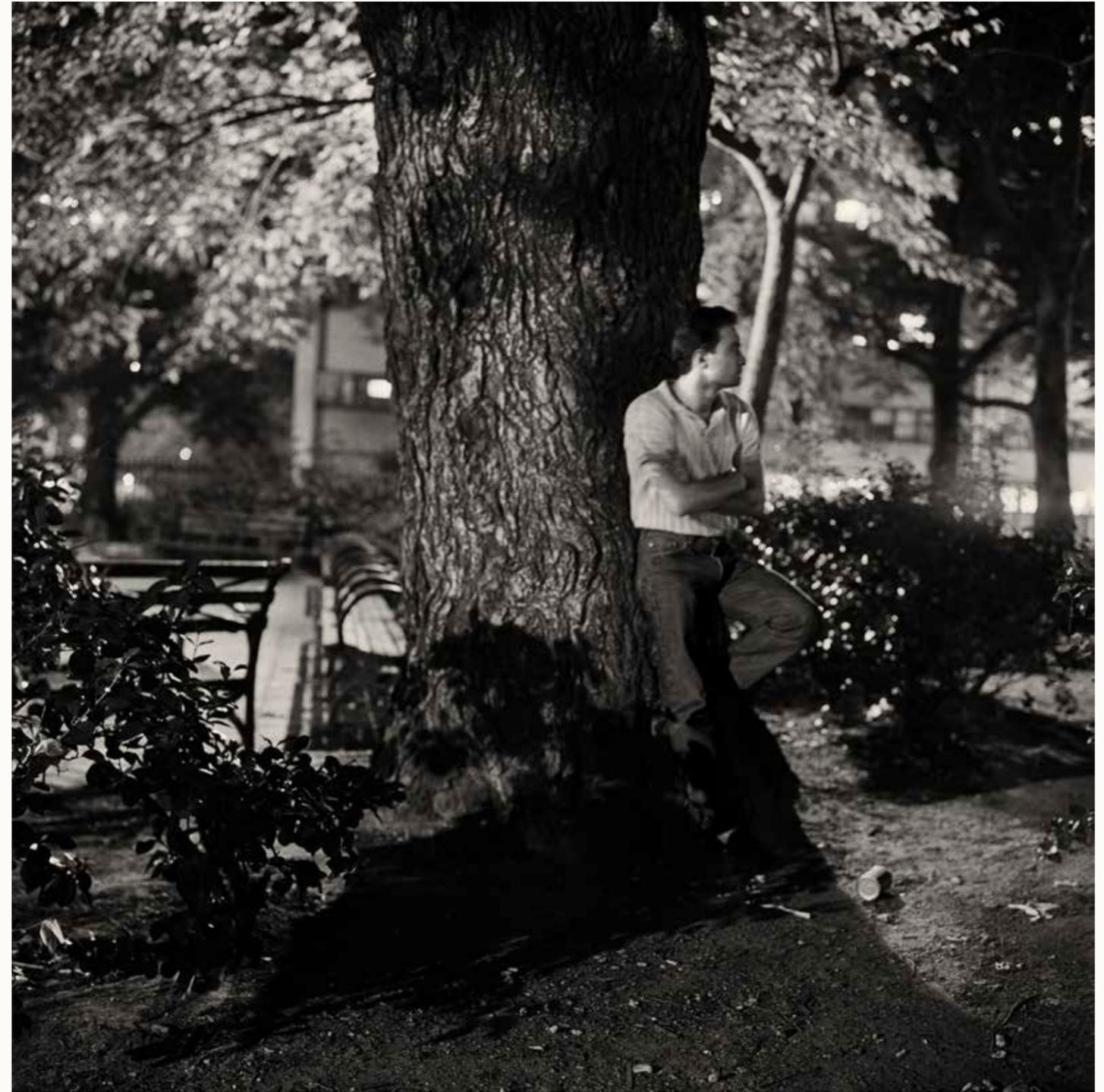
Peter photographed me on the bench in frame #3. He marked it with a grease pencil, but I have never seen a print of it. He was using me to get the attention of the park. At this point we had started playing. For frame #9 he had me lean against a tree. My arms are folded and I'm looking off, probably at the action in the park. Peter made a print of this frame.

In frames #10 and #11 Peter makes a self-portrait in the same position as the one he made of me. For these two frames, the camera was on a tripod, and he used a timer attached to his cable release. In his portrait he's gazing towards the lens and his hands are in his pockets.

The men seemed to recognize Peter, who was a fixture in the East Village and used this park to cruise.



GARY SCHNEIDER IN STUYVESANT PARK, 1981



ROLL 2

Peter was wanting to engage the other men in the park, and by roll 2 he begins to include them. Roll 1 was the set-up roll, to make the other men aware that we were having fun and to relax the cruisers and show them that we were friendly.

I have taken my shirt off in frame #1, still leaning against the tree.

Now I retreat behind Peter to resume my role as the eyes in the back of his head. He makes the next three frames of the man with a basket. He didn't print any of them.

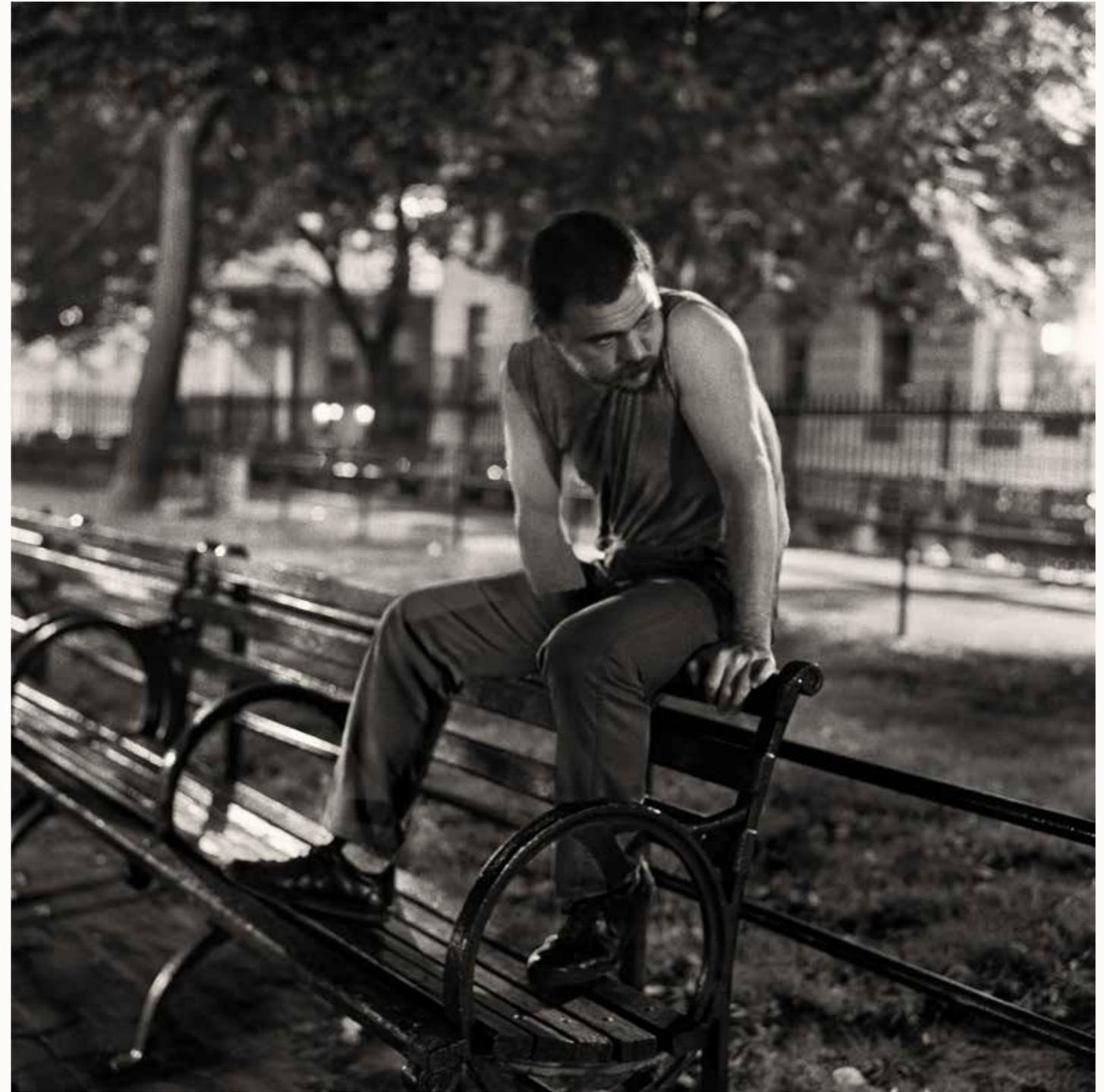
Peter wanted me to spice things up for frame #5. I take my penis out. This gets one of the cruisers quite excited and he gets an erection in his pants. This he clearly shows off for the camera in frames #6 and #7. It was very popular in the seventies and early eighties to go commando—no underwear—and this man is certainly proud of his erection.

In frames #10 through #12, he and I are sitting together on the bench. In frame #11, one can see that I'm having a conversation with the cruiser, but he's cruising Peter by his direct eye contact with him. It's a curious triangle.

Peter prints nothing from this roll.



BEARDED MAN ON PARK BENCH, 1981



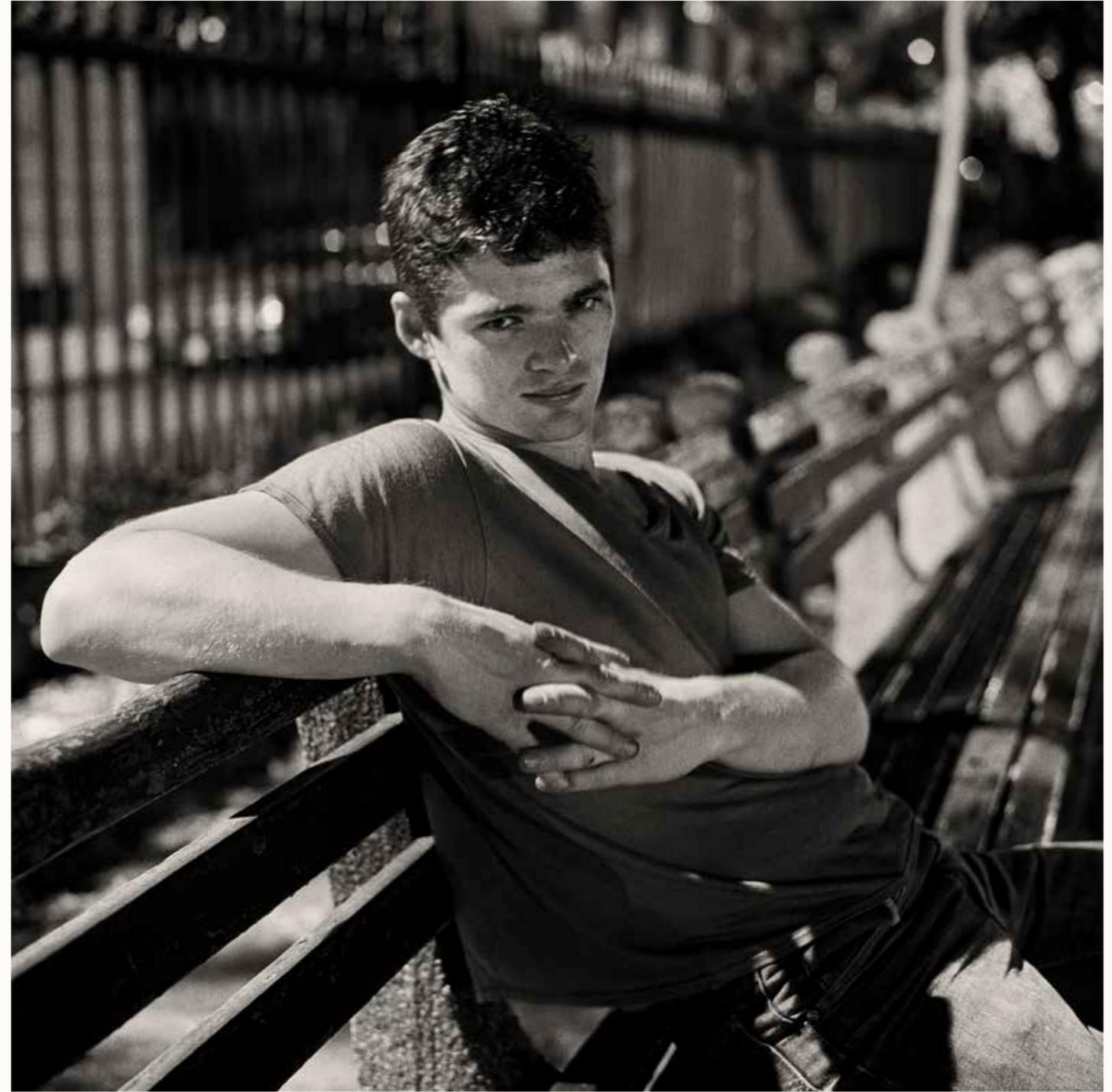
ROLL 4

In frame #2 the cruiser seems to have become shy, but certainly holds Peter's eye and Peter prints this frame. Peter poses him against a tree, which seemed to be his go-to pose that night.

In the remainder of the roll Peter engages a new person. Even though he exposes 11 frames of this man in rolls 4 and 5, he never chose a frame to print.



BOY ON PARK BENCH, 1981



ROLL 5

In frames #5 and #6 Peter moves onto a man in a striped sweatshirt. He abandons the idea and does not finish the roll of film.

Peter's mood was still upbeat after this fun session, so we would have continued the evening at The Bar, on Second Avenue and Fourth Street.



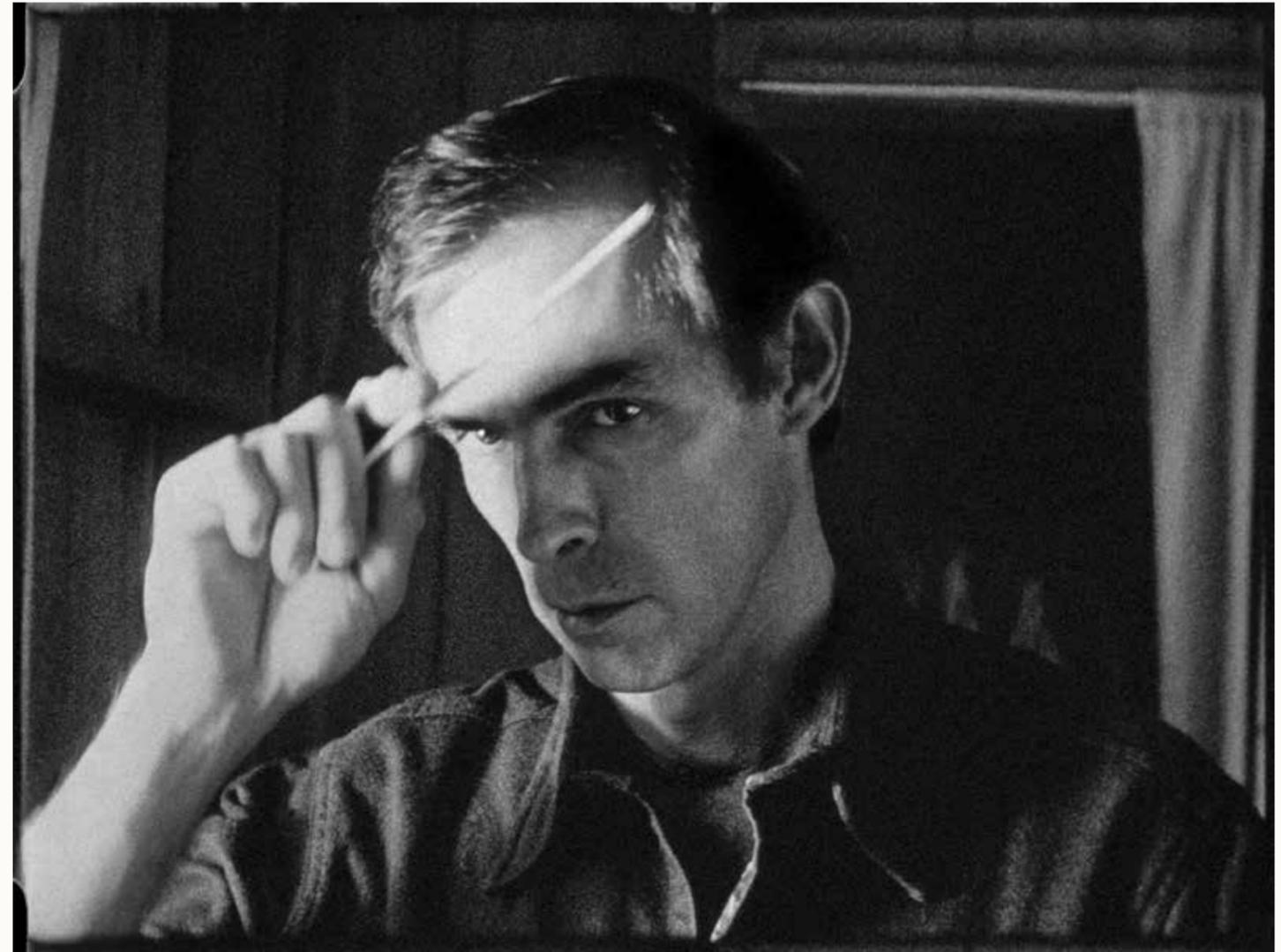
I made my third and last film, *Salter's Cottages* in the same summer that Peter photographed in Stuyvesant Park. I always worked with close friends, and still do. It features John Erdman, Peter Hujar, Suzanne Joelson and Gary Stephan. The film is loosely structured around voyeurs and exhibitionists in a cottage community on Long Island. It is influenced by Jean Genet's *Un Chant D'Amour*, 1950 and Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943. The dramatic lighting is borrowed from Peter, especially when I am photographing him.

I was comfortable directing Peter, even though there was very little directing. I'm mostly blocking: "Peter comb your hair, while looking in the mirror, remain fully aware of the camera standing in for John, watching you through the window".

When looking at the film now it reminds me how much fun we had and how Peter so fully brought himself to it, and gave me a wonderful performance. But it was a sober time too. An article had recently appeared in the *New York Times*, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals".

David Wojnarowicz and I exhibited photographs before we met Peter, but not after. Peter was the photographer. We only began again after his death. He could be critical of other photographers' work—there were exceptions, one being Nan Goldin, whom he called the "poet of the East Village". He predicted that at some point she would come to me to print her 1972 black and white images, and he said I had to do it, no matter what. She did. I printed them for her from 1990-1991.

Once David inherited Peter's loft and darkroom, he made impressive photographic prints, but he could only print comfortably up to 16x20 inches, so I made many large prints for his 1989 *In the Shadow of Forward Motion* exhibition at P.P.O.W Gallery. I began making my own new photographic work in 1988 and with David's introduction, began exhibiting with his gallery, in 1990.



JOHN ERDMAN AND GARY SCHNEIDER IN BED, 1986

Peter was high from his recent Gracie Mansion exhibition and making new work. He was excited to start a project photographing couples in bed.

When I began printing for Peter after his diagnosis, he would walk the eight blocks from his loft on Second Avenue and 12th Street to our lab on Cooper Square. As his health failed, we'd meet around his blue kitchen table instead. Late in Peter's illness he sent me into his darkroom to fetch some negatives. I hadn't been in his darkroom since his diagnosis. I was dumbfounded to discover his trays as he had left them, months earlier. The liquid chemistry had evaporated, and crystals had formed on the bottom—Peter had left his darkroom without cleaning the trays. He had always been so proud of the darkroom practice he had taught me. I stood there frozen.

Peter finally noticed that I had not come out yet. He screamed for me to get out of there. I felt that his desperate tone betrayed yet another coming face-to-face with his mortality.

I now had to accept that we had come to the end of the exchange we had developed over the ten years we knew each other.

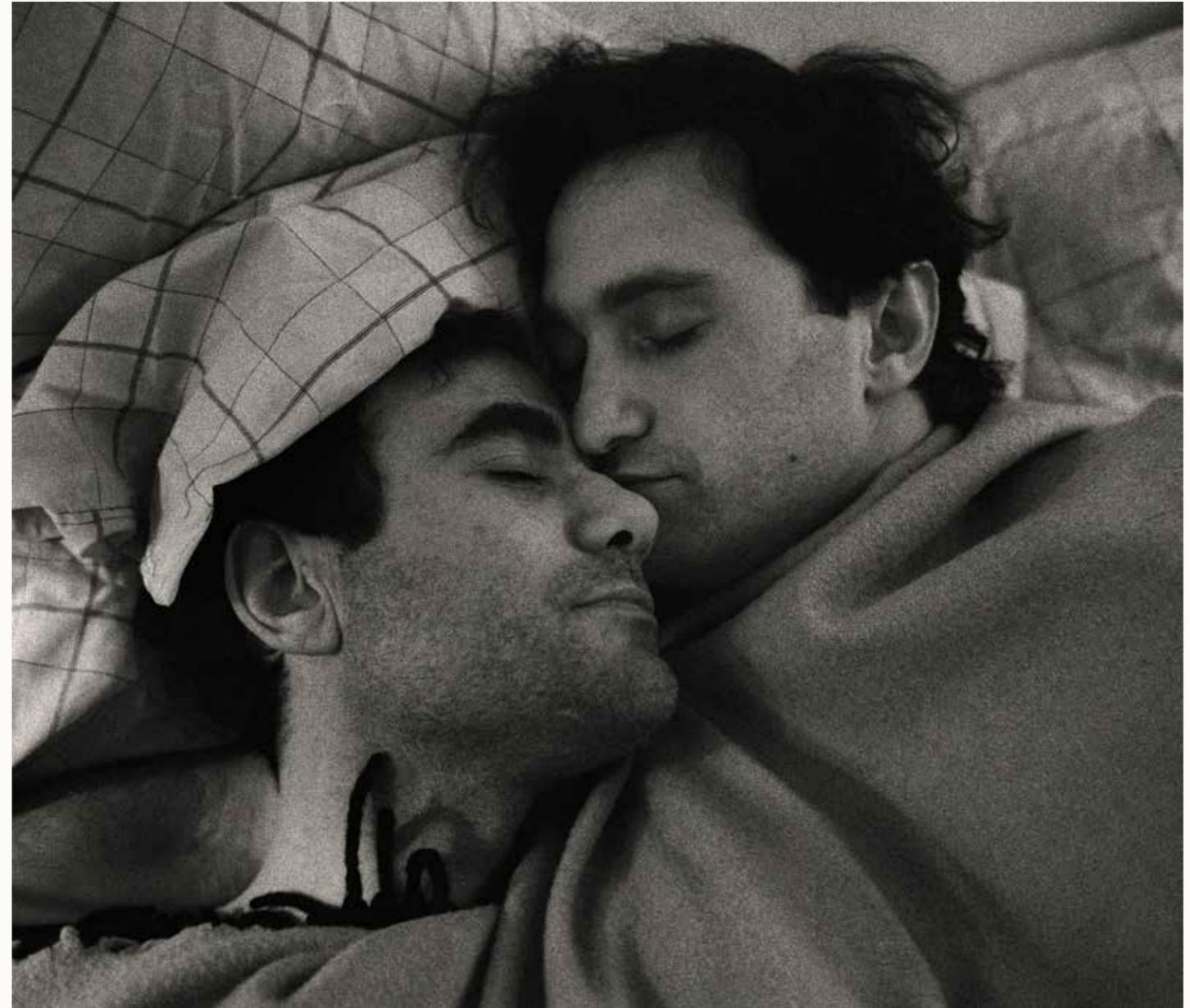
We would never be in his darkroom together again.

Peter was 20 years my senior.

I was 24 years old when Peter photographed me in his studio, and 26 when he performed in *Salter's Cottages*.

Peter died of AIDS on Thanksgiving Day, the 26th of November 1987, at the age of 53, and a day after my 33rd birthday. I will be 70 at publication of this book.

He was my dear friend and remains my mentor even now.



PETER HUJAR BEHIND THE CAMERA AND IN THE DARKROOM

GARY SCHNEIDER

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