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influence

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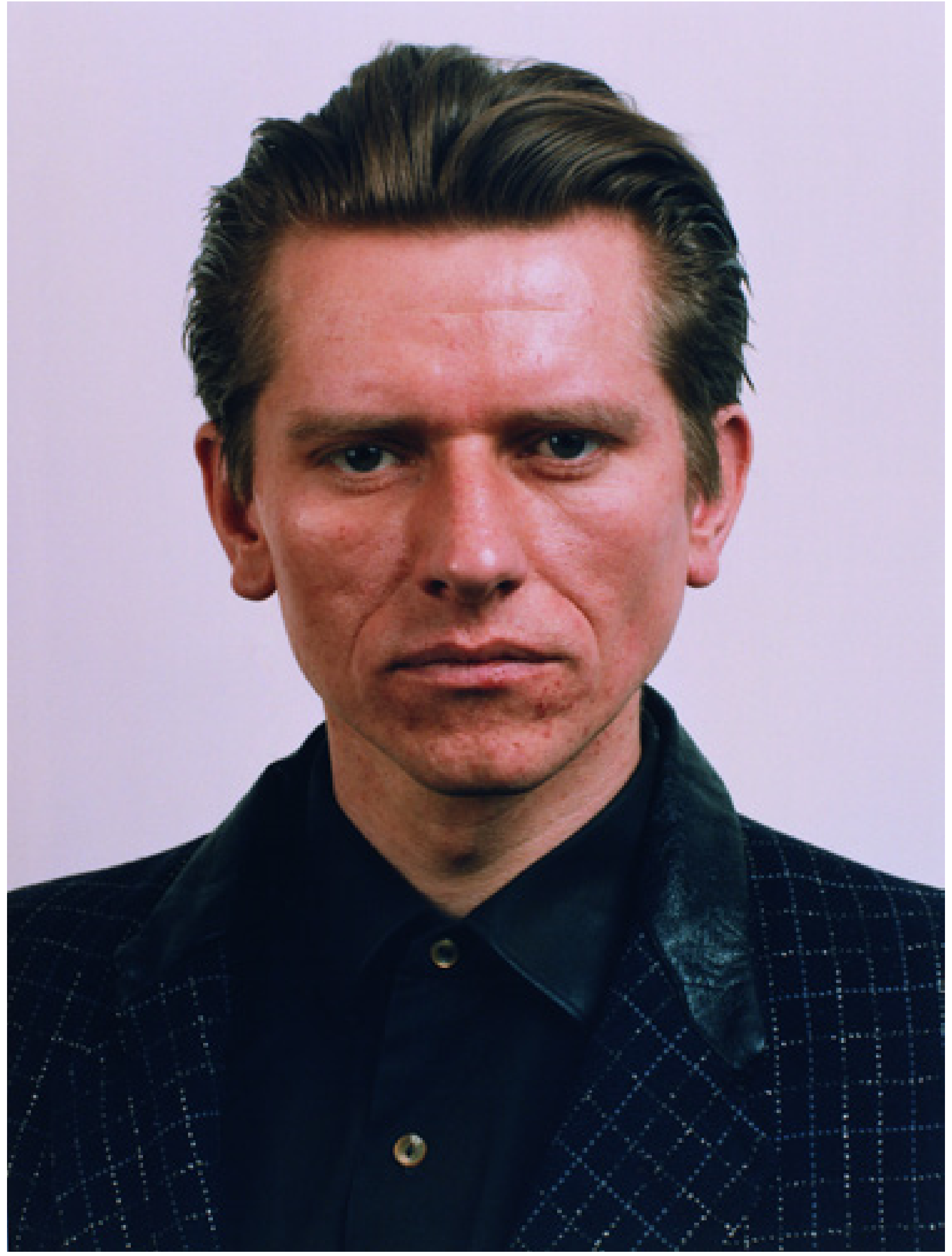


DOES A PORTRAIT WITHOUT IDENTITY STILL HAVE VALUE TO US AS PEOPLE?

(p. 48 *top-left*) **CURTIS, Edward**
Son of the Desert-Navaho, 1904. Photogravure courtesy Flury & Company, Seattle. http://www.fluryco.com.

"In the early morning this boy, as if springing from the earth itself, came to the author's desert camp. Indeed, he seemed a part of the very desert. His eyes bespeak all of the curiosity, all the wonder of his primitive mind striving to grasp the meaning of the strange things about him."
—EDWARD CURTIS

(p. 48 *top-right*) **CURTIS, Edward**
Shot in the Hand-Apsaroke, 1908. Photogravure courtesy Flury & Company, Seattle. http://www.fluryco.com.

"Picturing not only the individual but a characteristic member of the tribe—disdainful, energetic, self-reliant."
—EDWARD CURTIS

(p. 48 *bottom-left*) **SANDER, August**
Pastrycook, 1928. Silver gelatin print. © Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne / ARS, NY 2004.

(p. 48 *bottom-right*) **SANDER, August**
Bricklayer, 1928. Silver gelatin print. © Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne / ARS, NY 2004.

(p. 49 *top-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1983. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 49 *top-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1984. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

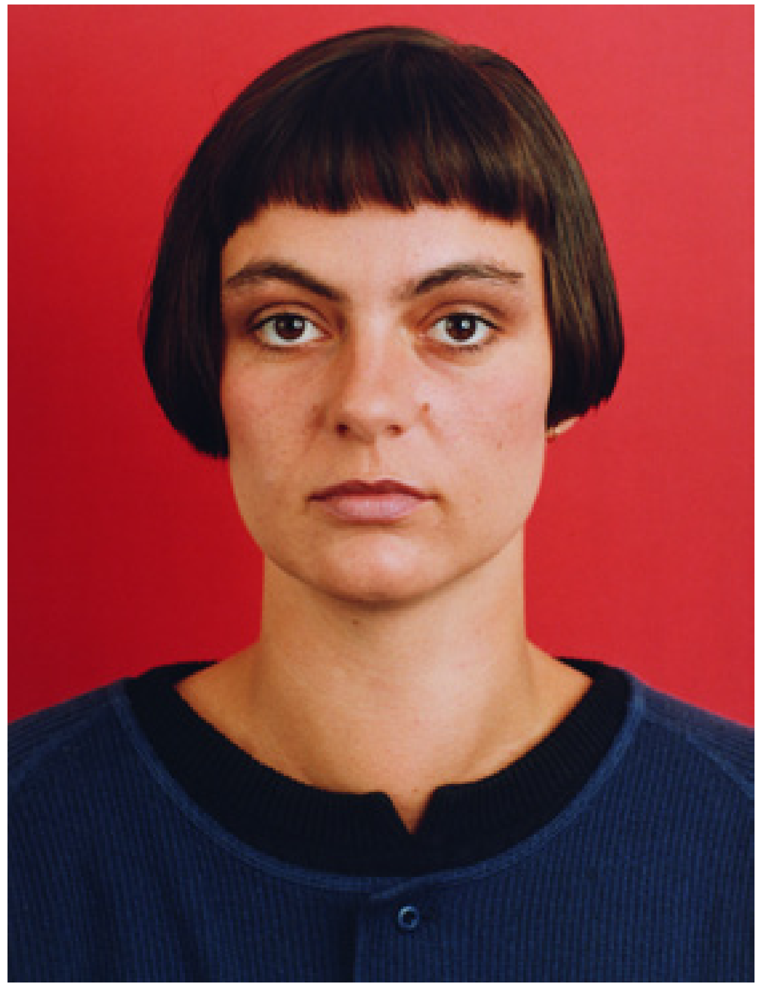
(p. 49 *bottom-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1984. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

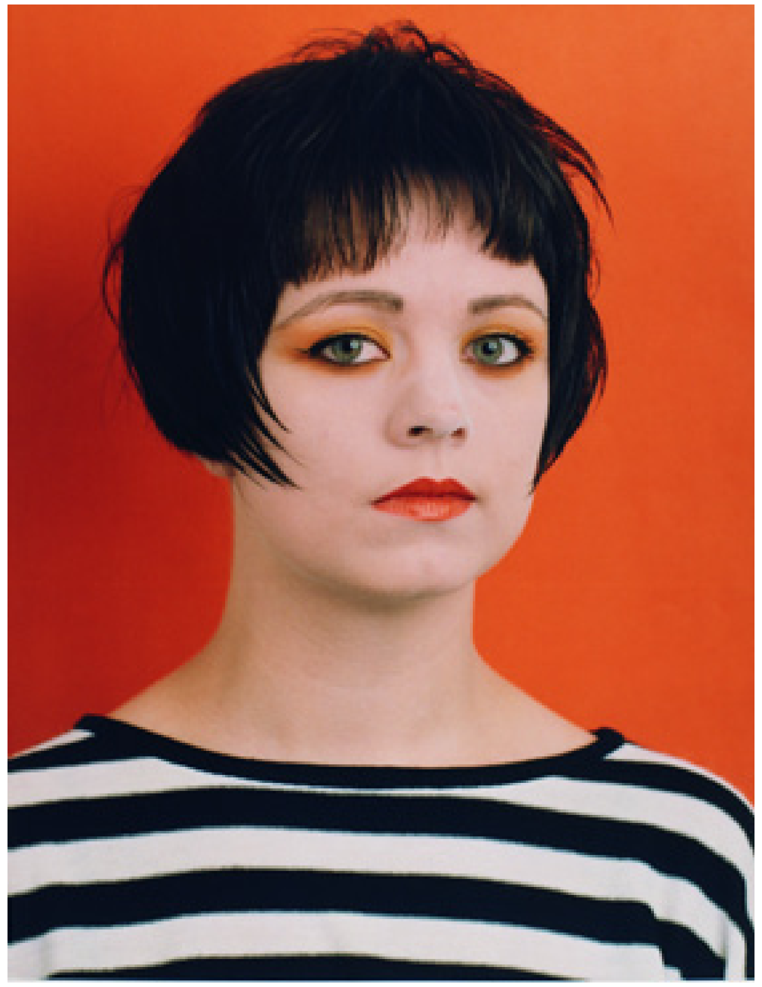
(p. 49 *bottom-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1984 (1986). Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 50) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1986. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

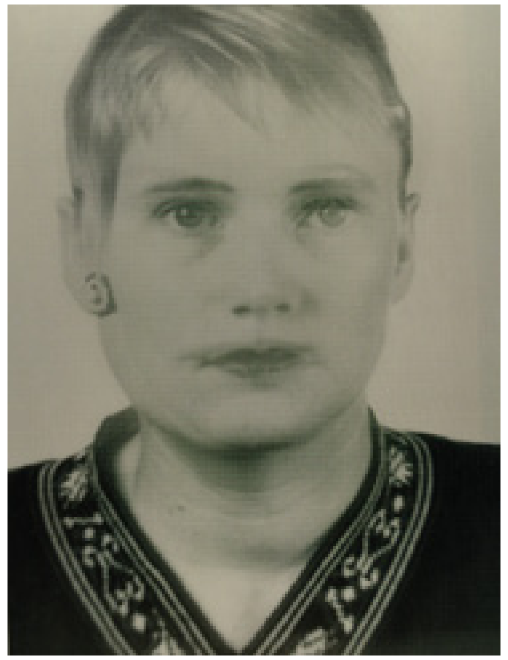
(p. 51 *left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1985 (1986). Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

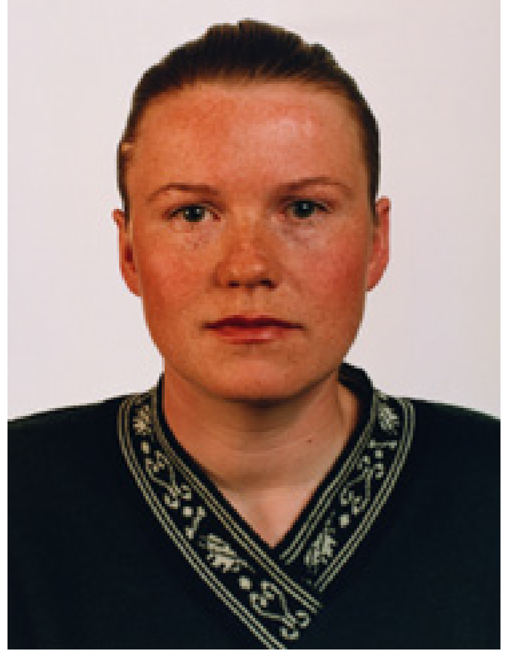
(p. 51 *right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1985 (1986). Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

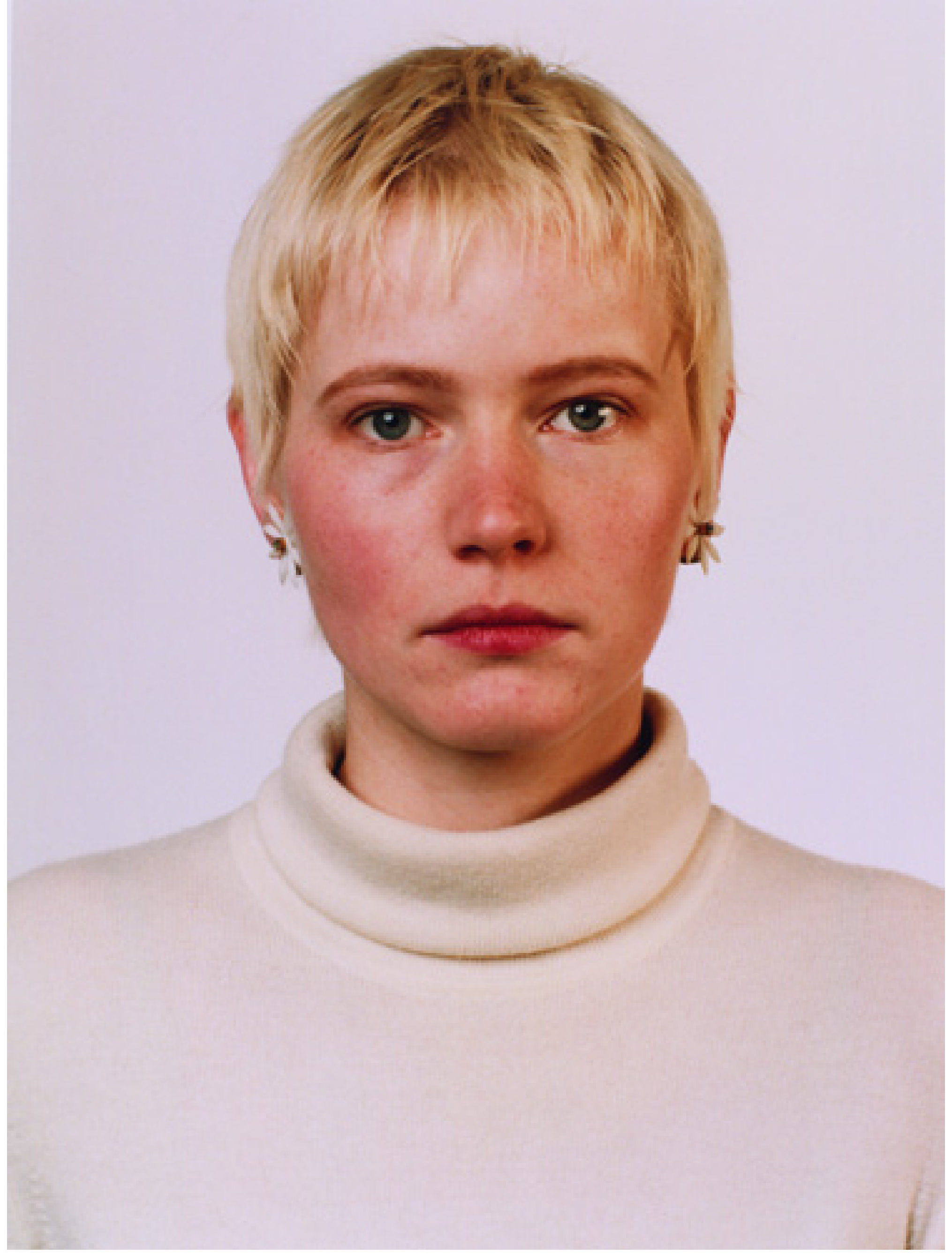




GIL BLANK Many of the portraits you've made are of people whom you know personally, but whom most viewers would not. You have a relationship to the subjects, but it would seem those relationships are totally neutralized in the photographs, by their uniform structure and plain, premeditated approach. Was the relative anonymity of the subjects a central part of the process? Did the individual relationships, as manifestations of your own individual knowledge of each person, ever enter into the process? Were the relationships totally incidental, or was the fact that you knew each person a specifically complicating fact that you wanted to see if you could address, avoid, or get around in the series? **THOMAS RUFF** When I started with the portraits, it was with an awareness that we were living at the end of the twentieth century, in an industrialized Western country. We weren't living by candlelight in caves anymore. We were in surroundings where everything was brightly illuminated—even our parking garages. Surveillance cameras were everywhere, and you were being watched all the time. When I started making the portraits in 1981, my friends and I were very curious about what might happen in 1984, Orwell's year. Would his ideas come to fruition? ¶ They already partly had, because in Germany there were the events surrounding the Red Army Faction, a terrorist group founded by Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and others. They plotted—and in some cases carried out—the assassinations of politicians and industry leaders, were captured, and then died under suspicious circumstances while in government custody. So the police were very nervous; there were a lot of controls placed on daily life, and we were often required to produce our passports for inspection. ¶ My idea for the portraits was to use a very even light in combination with a large-format camera, so that you could see everything about the sitter's face. I didn't want to hide anything. Yet I also didn't want the people I portrayed to show any emotion. I told them to look into the camera with self-confidence, but likewise, that they should be conscious of the fact that they were being photographed, that they were looking into a camera. ¶ I wanted to do a kind of official portrait of my generation. I wanted the photographs to look like those in passports, but without any other information, such as the subject's address, religion, profession, or prior convictions. I didn't want the police/viewer to get any information about us. They shouldn't be able to know what we felt at that moment, whether we were happy or sad. **GB** So in a sense they're "non-portraits"—they work directly against the most commonly valued aspect of the genre, that it captures some unspoken essence of the person, or more to the point, reveals a hidden truth. You seem to be saying that you actually made the portraits for the opposite reason: as stone walls, as a way of showing everything in order to reveal absolutely nothing. You extend this notion in a vast array of your other series, exploding the idea of original perception. Do you not retain any hope in photography as a way of understanding personal experience? **TR** I think it depends on the intention of the sitter, on how much information he or she allows to be shown. I don't think that my sitters build stone walls, but rather that they say to the viewer, "You can come this close, but no further." Maybe my portraits are anachronistic because even though they show every detail of the skin, clothes, and hair of the sitter, they still don't try to show any of his or her feelings. ¶ But to your question: Do you not retain any hope in photography as a way of understanding personal experience? What do you think about the portraits Richard Avedon did in the American West, where he asked workers, employers and housewives to stand in front of a white background? They're also stone walls, except that they're wearing their work clothes, or have little accessories to link them to their lived life. Does that information help very much, or isn't it just a cliché in the August Sander mold? **GB** That's precisely my point and the challenge: every portrait maker has to face down the soggy temptations handed to us by





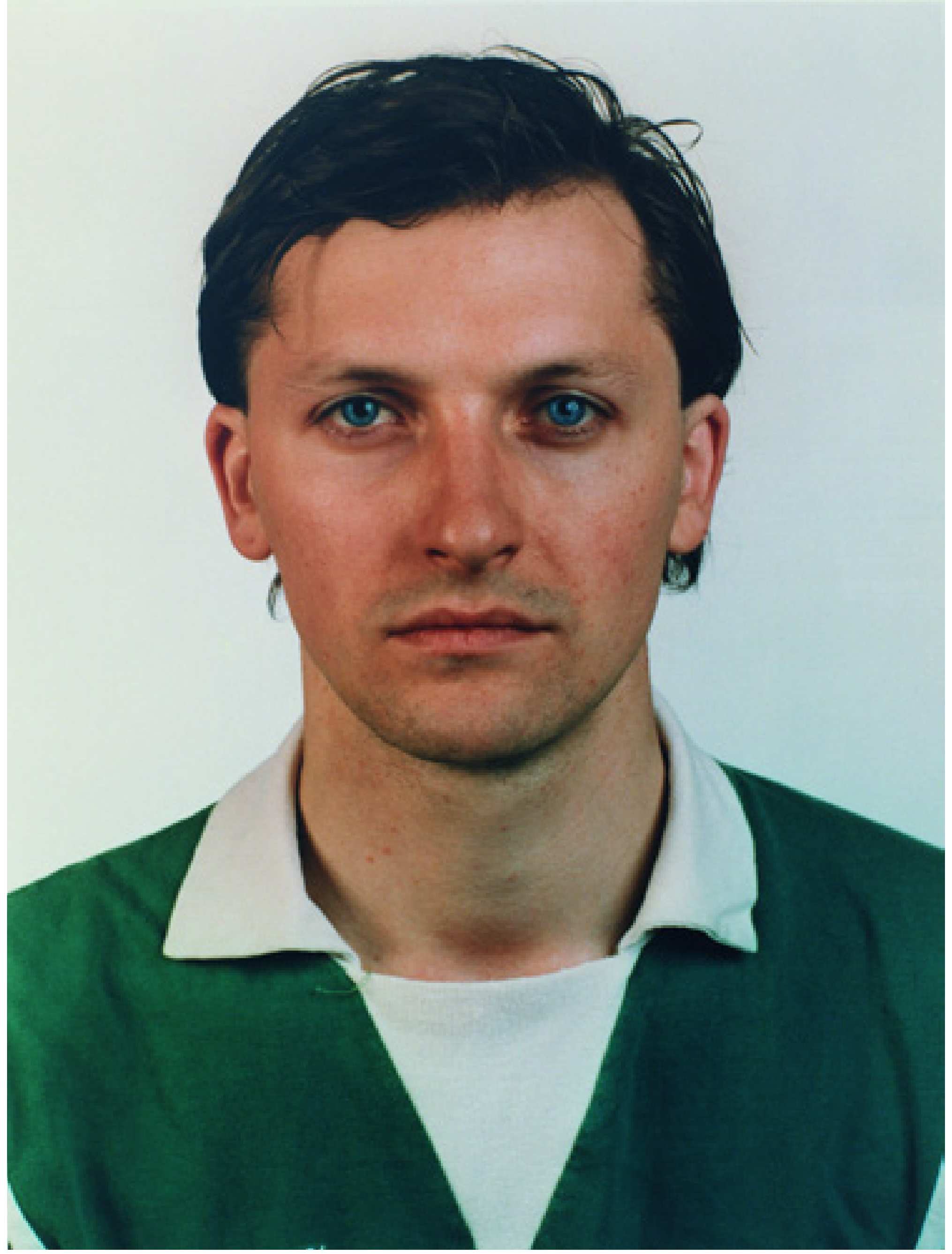


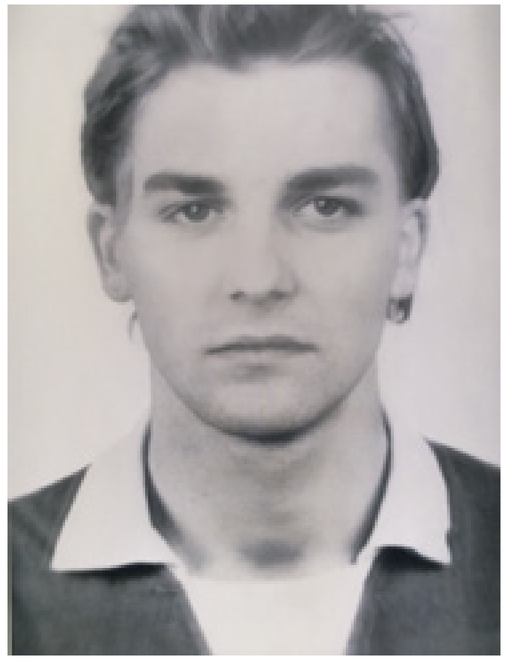
(p. 52 *top-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Anderes Porträt Nr. 109A/32, 1994-1995. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

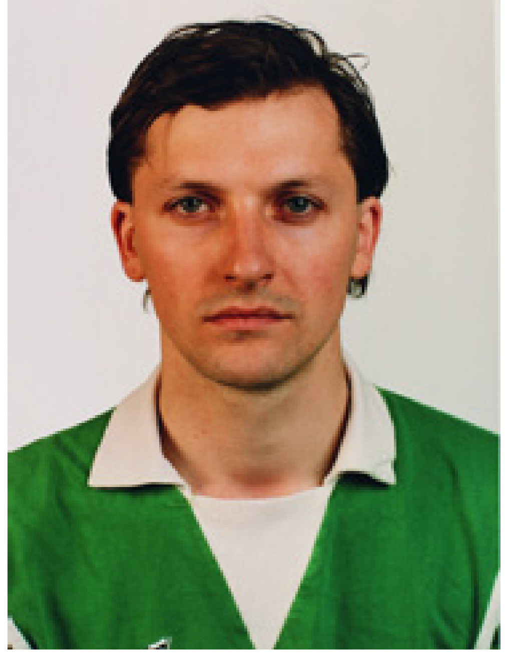
(p. 52 *bottom-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1987. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 52 *right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1986. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

photographers like Sander and Edward Curtis, the excited claims of being able to categorize and familiarize the entire world through images. Your mention of Avedon emphasizes that much of portraiture has been incapable of escaping Curtis' ghost. Avedon and Diane Arbus are to my mind arch perpetuators of his sentimental tradition. Theirs is a glib, New York version of sentimentality, one that thrills itself with the hysterical belief in antagonism and grit as truth, but that's sentimentality all the same. Provocative as their pictures may seem to be at first, people love them—perhaps counterintuitively—for that titillating myopia, because they corroborate, rather than challenge, our baser preconceived notions. They never make the more evolved leap to a form that genuinely tries to create a unique means for people to perceive one another. **TR** It's also probably got something to do with the person in the portrait. In my case, they were people between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-four, and life hadn't yet left any signs on their faces. They weren't babies, but they hadn't had too many bad experiences, either. They were in that state in which everything is still possible. If you make portraits the way Avedon or Arbus did, of people with a long past or a strange life, you can't escape the Curtis ghost. The same thing happens in photographs of children. All parents want their child's smile as proof that they've done a good job of parenting and that the child is happy. ¶ My portraits look so Appollonian because the sitters provide a perfect surface onto which the viewer can project anything, bad and good experiences alike. **THEY'RE NEUTRAL AND FRIENDLY, LIKE BUDDHAS. THEY'RE VESSELS YOU CAN FILL WITH ALL OF YOUR WISHES AND DESIRES.** **GB** But that openness can double as a form of visual opacity and blockage, and highlights the enduring portrait conundrum. We're faced with both the fundamental urge to understand our experiences, as well as all of the glaring historical examples of portraits that sentimentalize or exaggerate that struggle. We want to know things, and we also realize that there's a great barrier in life to that knowledge, but it's useless to stoop to mourn. Simply giving up is not a viable option. And you haven't, because you still make pictures. So the question remains, and it's at the very core of the photographic undertaking, epitomized by portraiture: How do we go about learning anything about experience, about ourselves and each other? Can you be utterly sober, can you speak as plainly as possible in pictures, without submitting to nostalgia or sensationalism or cynical cliché, and still manage some kind of approach within them to—as you put it—our actual, lived lives? **TR** All I can say is that it depends on the codes or clichés you're trapped by in your own life. **GB** And the stripping away of those social and photographic conventions is usually the preliminary reading people have of your series. The first time I saw your portraits, I was inclined to view them strictly in a formal context, as dry and rigorously effective deconstructions of the portrait genre. But now you've thrown me for a turn. By invoking a specific and highly personal period in history, your statements here suggest that there is indeed an additional element of direct experience involved in them, and so that for all their sobriety, for all their absolute refusal of allegory and symbolism and sentiment, they're nonetheless inextricably bound to real lives. **TR** Oddly enough, the same perception occurs even to me. Sometimes I think the portraits of Petra or Martin or whomever else don't represent the people themselves, but are merely examples of a type of photographic portraiture. And yet because these people sat in front of the camera when I made the exposure, there's a lot of real life and the actual person in each photograph. Sometimes I think the photographs are schizophrenic: the real people and their reflections spliced together. **GB** And I think channeling that ambiguity into a directly formal method is one approach to a more viable







(p. 53 *left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Blaue Augen R.H./B.E., 1991. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 53 *top-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Anderes Porträt Nr. 56/4, 1994-1995. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 53 *bottom-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1988. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

CHUCK CLOSE AT THAT TIME, IN THE LATE SIXTIES, THERE WAS A LOT OF ATTENTION PAID IF YOU COULD GET NEW PAINTINGS INTO A GALLERY, BECAUSE PAINTING WAS DEAD, FIGURATIVE PAINTING WAS REALLY DEAD, AND THE PORTRAIT WAS CONSIDERED ABSOLUTELY THE STUPIDEST THING YOU COULD DO. CLEMENT GREENBERG HAD SAID THAT THE ONLY THING AN ARTIST COULDN'T DO WAS PAINT A PORTRAIT. SO I THOUGHT THAT IF GREENBERG DIDN'T THINK IT WAS A GOOD IDEA, THEN I'D HAVE A LOT ROOM FOR MYSELF THERE. **GIL BLANK** Coming as it did on the heels of the Abstract Expressionist era, which was in many ways the apex of formalist art, was your portraiture primarily motivated by the same concerns, as essentially an assemblage of "marks on a flat surface," as you've said, or was there in fact any residue of the more ostensibly retrograde notions of the portrait, to distill in visual form a specificity of content, of who your subject was? **CC** Sure. These were my friends; these were people I was talking to—we influenced each other on a continual basis. Phillip Glass and I were helping Richard Serra make his lead prop pieces, and we were often in lofts listening to Phil play. Lucinda Childs was performing in there, and so on. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool formalist, but it's the dichotomy, the ripping back-and-forth between surface and image that always interested me. Paintings deny their physical reality: they may just be distributions of colored dirt on canvas, yet they make space where there isn't any. Similarly, presenting an image as a flat-footed, straightforward mugshot, without any editorial comment or high emotional reading need not be exclusive of the fact that these are still people, and they're people who matter to me. People lend me their image to do whatever it is I'm going to do with it, which is an act of extreme generosity and some courage on the part of my sitters. There's always an entrance into the work: when it's a representational painting, when it looks like a person, there is that entrance that we all share through basic life experience. So as much as I was a high formalist, as much as I was interested in the process, as much as it was about severe self-imposed limitations and distributions of marks on a flat surface, they're still images of people, and you still get to it through our shared human experience. **GB** You're talking about using the abstracting, flat surface of the painting as a scrim, a way of disrupting, or perhaps altering, direct observation, yet you insist on the insinuation of personal relationships within that. You turned to photographs as mechanically produced source material, but there's a difference here between your work and that of your contemporaries, like Lichtenstein and Warhol, because there remains that element of personal experience in the images, rather than appropriated iconography. **CC** Warhol was certainly a transitional figure at that point, but there were a lot of differences. He would make an image with one squeegee stroke, and I would sit there for months making each mark by hand. He was doing superstars and movie stars, but I wanted ordinary people. I only wanted to make images of people that mattered to me, but in a cool, arm's-length, detached way. I wanted to make something unexpected and even discomforting on some level, and at the same time I wanted to make it seductive, and even personal. ■

CLOSE, Chuck
Born in 1940, the prolific artist Chuck Close has redefined portraiture and extended the possibilities of painting since his work first attracted attention in the 1970s. While maintaining a sensibility that is distinctly his own, he has produced a body of work that has been associated with a variety of art movements, including Abstract Expressionism, Photorealism, Minimalism, and Process Art. He is best known for his monumental portraits of faces of friends and colleagues; over the years these have metamorphosed from airbrushed, sharply detailed black-and-white images into vividly colored, looser, more painterly portraits, with visible underlying grids. Close has also created some of his complex portraits with bits of colored paper pulp. His latest exhibition, *Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration* was shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the spring of 2004.

GREENBERG, Clement
The notoriously influential writer Clement Greenberg (1909–94) first attracted attention as an art critic while he was contributing to the journals *The Nation* and *Partisan Review*. He came to be both revered and vilified for his critical perspicuity and ability to make or break careers. Greenberg first championed Abstract Expressionist and then Color Field painting, promoting the work of artists that included Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, and Frank Stella. His breakthrough essay was "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," which appears in his most notable book, *Art and Culture* (1961). As formalism's most salient advocate, Greenberg promoted work that directly addressed the technical conundrums of art production, such as the flatness of painting's picture plane; consequently, he rejected Pop and Conceptual art.

GLASS, Phillip
The composer Philip Glass (born in 1937) is known for his rigorously complex, at times austere style. After attending the University of Chicago and Julliard, he studied with the legendary Nadia Boulanger in Paris (who also taught Aaron Copland and Virgil Thompson). An invitation to transcribe Indian music by Ravi Shankar into notation for Western musicians then led to travels to North Africa, India, and the Himalayas and a profound interest in Eastern music. In an effort to create more opportunities to perform his work, Glass cofounded the theater company Mabou Mines and launched The Philip Glass ensemble. His radically inventive collaborations with theater director Robert Wilson include the four-and-a-half-hour epic opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) is perhaps his most notable film project; he has also written film scores for movies that include Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* (1997), Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998), and Errol Morris's *The Fog of War* (2003).

SERRA, Richard
Best known for his monumental leaning sculptures, Richard Serra (born in 1939) received a master's degree from Yale in studio art in 1964, then traveled to Paris and Italy on a Yale Traveling Scholarship and a Fulbright. Jobs he had earlier held working in West Coast steel mills and shipyards inspired him to begin making artworks in steel and lead. His process-oriented thrown molten lead pieces were associated with the post-Minimalist movement first discussed by critic Robert Pincus-Witten. Serra's subsequent work, such as the "Torqued Ellipses" series, is memorable for its often overwhelming physicality.

CHILDS, Lucinda
The choreographer Lucinda Childs (born in 1940) launched her eponymous dance company in 1973. She majored in dance at Sarah Lawrence, where she studied with Bessie Schonberg and Merce Cunningham. After graduating she was a member of Greenwich Village's famed Judson Dance Theatre, which often incorporated mundane movements such as sitting or walking into its performances. In developing her own imaginative aesthetic in notable works including *Dance* (1979) and *Available Light* (1983), Childs has collaborated with artists from various disciplines, including Robert Rauschenberg, Sol LeWitt, Phillip Glass, and Robert Wilson.

LICHTENSTEIN, Roy
When gallery dealer Leo Castelli took the painter Roy Lichtenstein (1923–97) into his stable of artists, giving him a solo show in 1962, Lichtenstein was already a professor of art who had pursued a number of painting styles and motifs before settling on Pop imagery—he had dabbled intermittently with pop culture sources but focused exclusively on the style only after his son challenged him to paint an image of Mickey Mouse. The comic-strip images Castelli exhibited featured the Ben-day dots, lettering, and speech or thought balloons that would frequently reappear in Lichtenstein's work. Lichten-stein went on to use his signature style to represent advertising images, work by other twentieth-century artists, landscapes, and explosions. During the eighties he also made superbly ironic paintings and sculptures of brushstrokes, and, in the "Interiors" series during the nineties, he depicted his own works deployed as interior decoration.

WARHOL, Andy
The renowned commercial artist, painter, filmmaker, and impresario Andy Warhol (1928–87) is best known for his Pop artworks including silk-screens of Campbell's Soup cans and portraits of Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, and others, which distilled celebrity to a rarefied essence. Highly responsive to ideas percolating in the art and film worlds at the time, however, Warhol was inspired by experimental artists like Jack Smith to make films that defied cinematic conventions; he also produced albums by the Velvet Under- ground and founded the pop-culture magazine *Interview*.

(p. 54 *left*) **CLOSE, Chuck**
Chuck Close in his studio on Greene Street, New York, 1967. Silver gelatin print. © Chuck Close, courtesy the artist.

(p. 54 *center*) **CLOSE, Chuck**
Chuck Close in his studio on Greene Street, New York, 1967. Silver gelatin print. © Chuck Close, courtesy the artist.

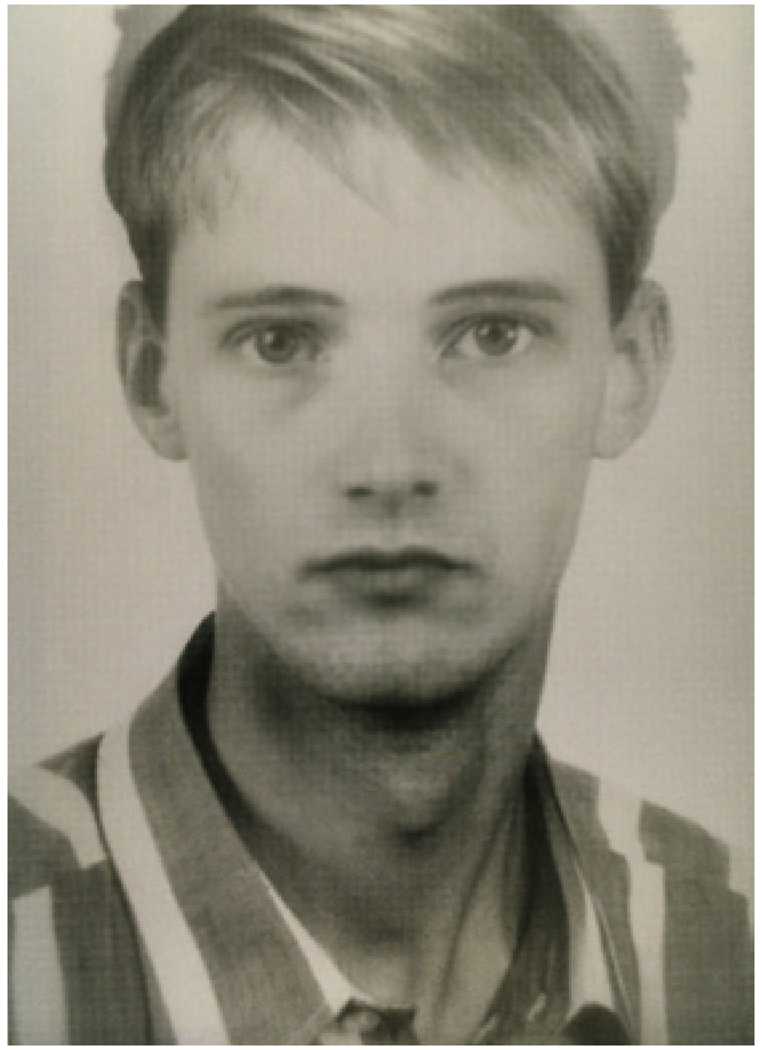
(p. 54 *right*) **GURSKY, Andreas**
Untitled, 1985. C-Print. © Andreas Gursky, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

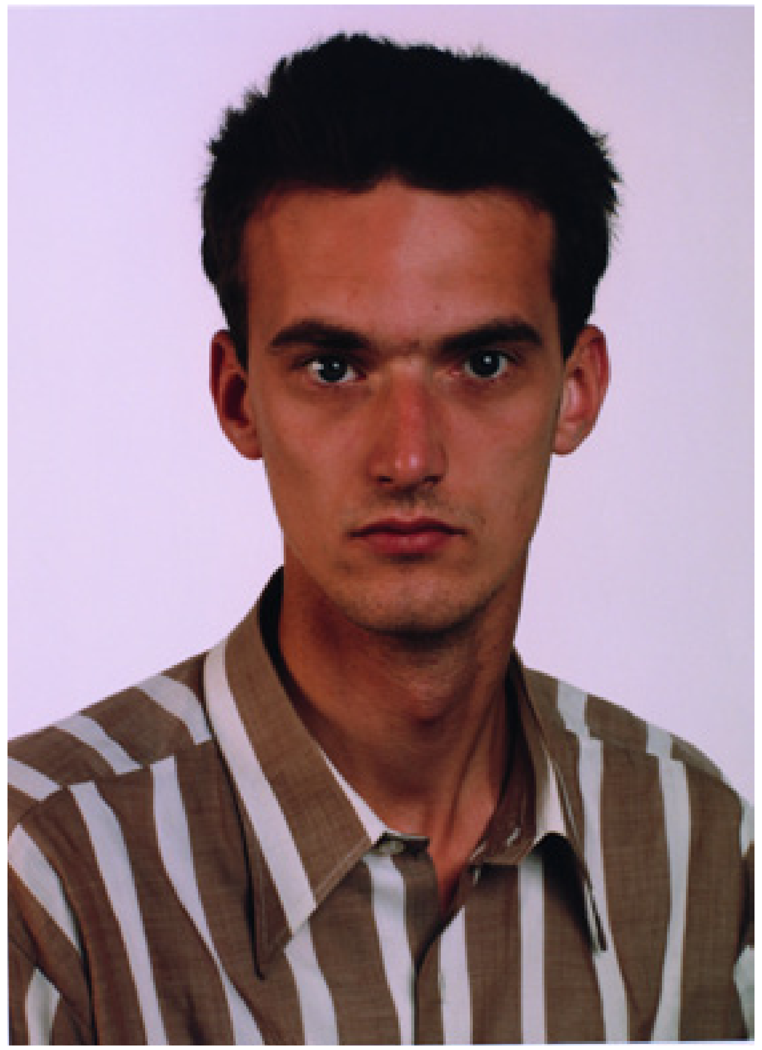
portraiture, because it mirrors our fractured knowledge, or ignorance, of people as well. Much of your work makes prominent use of those formal concerns, posing questions about the specific nature of photographs and knowledge. You reduce experience into a hermetic, even abstract exercise, crushing the images of what we thought we knew down into a parallel non-reality. There's a brutal firmness about this, both devastating and liberating. **TR** In a way I wanted to blot out any traces or information about the person in front of the camera. I also wanted to indicate that the viewer is not face-to-face with a real person, but with a photograph of a person. Quite often people at the exhibitions say, "Oh, that's Heinz, that's Peter, that's Petra," because they're looking through the photograph, confusing the medium with reality. By blowing the portraits up to a colossal scale, I forced the viewer to realize that he is not standing in front of Heinz, but in front of a photograph of Heinz. **GB** We've seen that kind of device before in portraiture, as in the work of Chuck Close. But there are some very important differences, not the least of which is that Close is dealing with paintings, and the immediate realization a viewer has that one is looking at exactly that, at "marks of colored dirt smeared on a flat surface." Close has even asserted that his particular formalist exercise wouldn't work the same way with photographs, because there is no moment of cognitive dissonance with photographs the way there is in painting, when the overall pictorial image breaks down and manifests itself as a handmade object. My point, frankly, isn't just about formalism anyway, because I think a purely formalist reading of your approach is vastly oversimplified, and nowhere is that more sharply demonstrated than in the portraits. To be sure, your systematic approach of creating pictures in exhaustive series, combined with techniques like collage, infrared imaging, appropriation, and digital manipulation, does force us to reconsider what we know of the integrity of photographs. What I'm getting at, though, is that it's one thing to do this with inanimate objects like buildings or with already existent images as in your appropriation of newspaper photographs, and entirely another thing to implicate the direct involvement of live human beings into this analytical process as subjects. **TR** Life can be hard and artists can be brutal. But I must say that this was my particular investigation of portraiture, and it was made possible by the collaboration of my friends. I think it worked so well because all of my sitters possessed a high degree of visual fluency; they were artists too, and they were capable of dealing with the way I made the portraits of them. I couldn't have done it with my former school friends who stayed in the small village where I grew up, and are now butchers or bank employees. Those people would have been lost in front of my camera. I didn't harm any of my friends. They each received a print of their portrait, and if they needed a passport photograph, I even gave them a small one for that as well. **GB** Thus closing the circle with an even more insidiously effective means of exhibition than showing them on a wall. As one of the most traditionally cherished methods of constructing ideas about each other, does portraiture have any remaining use at all, in your opinion? Do you keep family albums, for instance? You have a newborn child. How might you

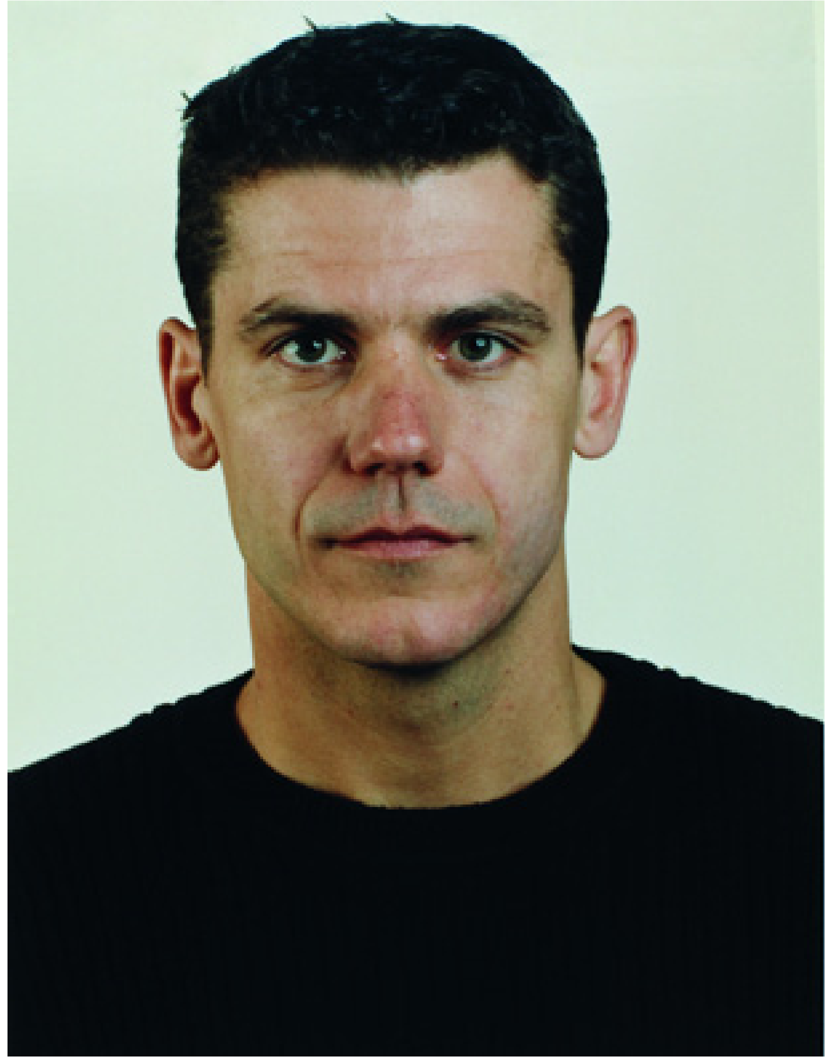
ORWELL, George
Born in England as Eric Arthur Blair, the writer George Orwell (1903–50) was a renegade in his thinking and behavior throughout much of his life. As a young man, he chose to live in poverty for several years, writing about his experiences; in addition, although he worked for the Allied side during the Second World War, he made controversial remarks questioning reports of the Holocaust. Although he was critical of Communism, he considered himself a socialist and was wounded in the Spanish Civil War. His best-known books, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), are fierce critiques of totalitarianism.

(p. 55 *left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Anderes Porträt Nr. 109A/11, 1994 - 1995. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 55 *right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1987. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.







go about recording her image and building her history? **TR** ...and so I make a lot of beautiful photographs of my little daughter. **THE NEXT GENERATION, NEW PROBLEMS OF REPRESENTATION... GB** ...which is exactly the kind of primary experience I've never seen you address in your work. Not only are the images taken directly from everyday life, they are in fact from your own life. I don't think anyone would exactly call you a diarist, so how do you go about reframing the everyday into a document suitable for public consumption? **TR** I'm a human being with an everyday life, so sometimes I'm happy, and sometimes things upset me. During the everyday, things happen and I react. If it's a personal matter I respond directly, while other things force me to react with an artistic work. But I don't stay personal. I'm trying to find a form that's also interesting for other people to deal with. **GB** Which is perhaps why many of your series deal with archetypes. I've never known you to pursue the exquisite single image so valued in traditional photography, but rather you question the accepted iconic form of what we expect an image to be. That frustration of originality is, I think, most poignant and painful in the portraits. **TR** Everybody has his own history of treating images and their iconic forms, but I think a lot of people just aren't aware of how they can be manipulated by either the government or the advertising industries if they aren't being attentive. Family photographs are probably inoffensive, but as soon as photographs are made by a professional, you need to be careful, because there is then a vendor/client relationship, and that begins to involve personal/political/commercial interests. **GB** You've spoken about that before, when you mentioned that "Most of the photos we come across today aren't really authentic anymore—they have the authenticity of a manipulated and prearranged reality." That a photograph may or may not allow access to authenticity is one notion, and a fairly commonplace one, but how is that any different from photography in the past? Are you talking only about the social belief in the truth of photographs as something that we've lost, or does the proliferation of photographs mean that the medium itself has lost some kind of ability to communicate? **TR** I think that historically photographs may have been made in a naive and honest way, when photographers believed in the "pencil of nature" and recording what was in front of the camera. But photography quickly came to be used in a prejudicial way, losing its innocence and consequently its ability to communicate. **GB** You seem to be addressing that directly in the *Anderes Porträt* ["*Other Portraits*"] series. How were those pictures generated, and what was the motivation behind them? **TR** I'd been told that my portraits were anti-individual, anti-personal, and so on, because they only showed the sitter's face and nothing more. But I'd thought my process was reflective of real personality, that it illustrated how an individuum is unique and doesn't exist a second time, except perhaps in twins. **GB** An idea that you highlighted by doubling your own self-portrait, suggesting the ambiguities and schisms that exist internally. With the *Anderes Porträt* series however, you inverted that by fusing separate identities. **TR** The idea was to re-create a face: if you based an image on the nose, eyes, mouth, chin, and forehead that make up 90 percent of a person's appearance, would it still resemble the person I photographed? I had to come to the realization that my portraits are totally individual and totally intimate, that you simply can't imitate a face. A face is unique. ¶ I tried this with a machine that had been used in the seventies by the police to find suspects based on witness descriptions. It worked on an analog basis, from the direct combination of separate negatives, so I then decided to create new faces that didn't exist. I'd gotten the machine from a museum of police history, but they weren't allowed to also give me the archive of faces they had compiled. That wasn't a problem, though. I had my own archive of faces: my portraits. So I started mixing them. I combined two faces at a time, first male with male, then female-female, male-female, and finally female-male. I was wondering whether mixing two really male faces would yield a more male-looking face, a "macho" type, or if mixing two beautiful women would get me to Superwoman. ¶ But it wasn't manageable. It was all trial and error. I had to test every face with each other one. I failed every time I thought one face would go perfectly with another. Nature was striking back. **GB** But wait—now the contradictions begin to surface, because all of this experimentation and talk of the Superwoman does begin to sound uncomfortably like the Fascist theory you seek to undermine. **TR** At the end of the eighties, a French critic alleged that my portraits—probably because they were so big— were either Fascistic art or Socialist Realism. He couldn't decide, but in any case, being compared as a German artist to the Fascists made me very upset. I decided in response to co-opt the cliché of Aryan art: portraits with blue eyes. I selected six male and six female portraits that I had already made, and added the iris of a female portrait that had bright blue eyes. I printed them at about 45 cm x 35 cm and hung them in a row. Surprisingly, though, they didn't remind me of ugly theories from the 1930s, but more of discussions we have today—like genetic engineering—because the faces looked contemporary. ¶ With the *Anderes Porträt*, my thoughts were similar. It was an investigation into how far you can go with mixing faces. I was also thinking about how there are sperm banks where you can choose your genetic material, like getting sperm from very intelligent people to produce an intelligent child, for instance. All of this was in my mind when I played Frankenstein (and Superwoman and Macho Man). They're based on my curiosity about how things or images work. Do we have imagination sufficient to create a new world, or is nature that much more surprisingly varied and sophisticated than the human brain? We probably only have a fraction of the imagination of what nature/evolution/god can develop; I think our brains are just too small in comparison. But I'm getting overly philosophical. ¶ The idea was to create nonexistent faces, ones that could conceivably exist but don't. I didn't want to use a computer, because the resulting manipulation would have been perfect. I purposely used an old analog technique because it was quite rough. You could recognize the manipulation, but you could also choose to suppress the manipulation (in a Freudian way) and look into a new face. **GB** Do you actually consider the *Anderes Porträt* series to be portraits at all, then, or some other form? **TR THEY'RE VIRTUAL PORTRAITS, FACES OF NONEXISTENT PERSONS. MUST A PORTRAIT ONLY REPRESENT AN EXISTING FACE?** Perhaps they can imply the compound dimension of personalities and identities as they do—and don't—exist. **GB** The portrait series have undergone a number of changes over the years. During the first few rounds, from about 1981 to 1991, the changes seem mostly addressed to graphic concerns—matters of scale, color, and so on. Something different happened when you returned to the portraits in 1998. Matthias Winzen went so far as to say that you were "trying to find out if it is legitimate to imitate oneself." What drew you back to the form? **TR** Two things interested me. Maybe three. The first one was to find out if the portraits were only perfect for the eighties if it was strictly a work made at the right time and the right place—or if they were more universal. I wanted to see if they were timeless, if it was a form that could survive not only a decade but also the millennium. ¶ The second was to test the reaction of the art world to an artist imitating a work that had already been completed ten years earlier. To ignore the evolution of artistic development. To go back both mentally and formally. I was interested in watching whether the art world would refuse to see it as progress, and say instead that Thomas Ruff had gotten old and had no more ideas, that he'd gone senile. ¶ The third motivation was to investigate the differences between the way my friends looked in the eighties, and the way that people of that same age group but a different generation looked ten years later. **GB** In fact, it seems you've come back to the portraits more often than any other subject. If portraits are the exception to your standard procedure with the series form, does that have something to do with the subject, with the fundamental aspect of interpersonal relations? Is this the one way that your people are different from your stars and buildings, for instance? **TR** There are four series with portraits—the eighties, the nineties, the *Anderes Porträt* and the portraits with the blue eyes, a variation of the eighties. So that's not so much. **GB** But is there possibly something in portraiture that can serve as the basis for a lifelong exploration, even for someone so committed to the exhaustive dismantling of the integrity of images as we know them? **TR** As I mentioned before, everyone creates his or her own experience. We develop codes as an orientation frame for moving as a human being in this world and managing our relation to it. Portraiture worked two thousand years ago and it still works today. The changes are only matters of formality, of sophistication and complication. ■

Red Army Faction
Otherwise known as the Baader-Meinhof gang, the Red Army Faction was the most infamous German terrorist organization to arise during the postwar period. The group's core consisted of Andreas Baader, Gudrin Ensslin, and the former radical journalist Ulrike Meinhof, who had helped Baader escape from prison when he was jailed for arson. Beginning in the late sixties, they sought to trigger a socialist revolution through violent action, staging kidnappings, shootings, bombings, and bank robberies. By the mid-seventies, they were involved in international terrorism. The leaders were captured in 1972 along with RAF members Jean-Carl Raspe and Holger Meins, and their followers kidnapped and killed numerous people in an attempt to secure their release. Meins died of a hunger strike in 1974, Meinhof hanged herself in 1976, and Baader Ensslin, and Raspe committed suicide on October 18, 1977. Some on the German left still believe that Meinhof, Ensslin, and Raspe were murdered in a government cover-up.

AVEDON, Richard
Known primarily for his stark portraits, Richard Avedon (born in New York City in 1923) documented figures that include Jean Genet, Brigitte Bardot, John Cheever, Roy Lichtenstein, Harold Bloom, and Andy Warhol. Avedon worked as a photographer for the Merchant Marines before establishing his reputation as an advertising and editorial photographer for Harper's Bazaar, Vogue, Look, and other magazines. He passed away in 2004 while on assignment for *The New Yorker*, where he had worked as a staff photographer since 1992.

SANDER, August
During the mid-thirties the German photographer August Sander (1876–1964) began pursuing a monumental project he entitled *People of the Twentieth Century*. He hoped to achieve an objective portrait of a society in transition, not by presuming to depict his subjects' interior life but by classifying their differing circumstances. He divided the portraits into a number of major groups, or "archetypes": *The Farmer*, *The Skilled Tradesman*, *The Woman*, *Classes and Professions*, *The Artists*, *The City*, and *The Last People*. In his essay "A Short History of Photography," Walter Benjamin championed Sander's subtly subversive images over Albert Renger-Patzsch's lovingly rendered industrial forms. Artists Sander has influenced include Walker Evans, Diane Arbus, and Bernd and Hilla Becher. His 1929 book *Face of our Time* (which aroused the ire of the Nazi regime) is the first antecedent for photo books such as Robert Frank's *The Americans*.

CURTIS, Edward S.
Edward S. Curtis (1868–1952) is best known for his monumental and now-controversial work of ethnographic photography, The North American Indian. Initially funded by J. P. Morgan, the project documented the native lifeways and customs of tribes from the Great Plains, the Great Basin, the Plateau Region, the Southwest, California, the Pacific Northwest, and Alaska.

WINZEN, Matthias
The German curator and critic Matthias Winzen is the director of the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden. He curated the recent exhibition "Thomas Ruff: 1979 to the Present," which was the first retrospective of work by the photographer Thomas Ruff.

(p.56 *top-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1986. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 56 *top-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1989. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 56 *bottom-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1987. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

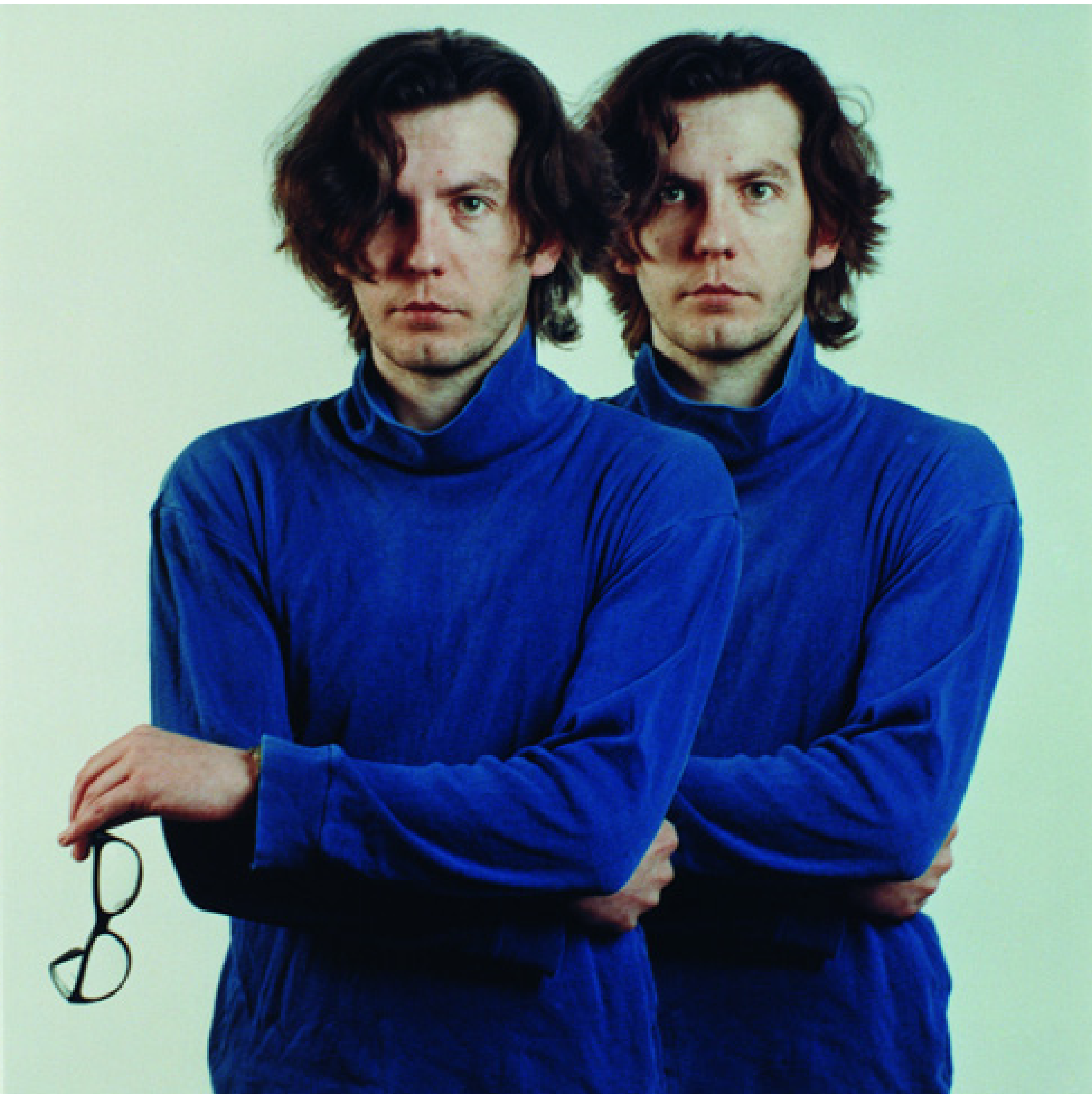
(p. 56 *bottom-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1988. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 57 *top-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 2000. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 57 *top-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1999. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 57 *bottom-left*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1998. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(p. 57 *bottom-right*) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1998. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.



(p. 59) **RUFF, Thomas**
Porträt, 1991. Chromogenic color print. © Thomas Ruff, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.