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Author(s): Silvola, Kari

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“MY LIES AND LIAISONS WITH MARILYN”

An Autofictional Representation of the Downtown Man, a Finnish Successor to the Marlboro Man in the Early 1990s

Kari Silvola

ABSTRACT

In this autobiographical/autofictional article, I analyze the representation of masculinity, an advertising poster for a new Finnish cigarette brand from the 1990s recession, when a new man, a “softie,” debuted under the pressure of the traditional male model and the twenty-first-century dudes and lads. The model posing in the poster is a homosexual, me. In the article I ask whether a gay could represent a Finnish man in the early 1990s or only present him. I examine the picture with a queer eye in search of inconsistencies and distortions that break present alternative interpretations to heteronormativity.

Keywords: homosexuality, masculinity, heteronormativity, advertising, representation, autofiction

ABSTRAKTI

”Valheeni ja viettelykseni Marilyn kanssa”. Downtown-miehen eli Marlboro-miehen suomalaisen manttelinperijän autofiktiivinen representaatio

Analysoin autobiografisessa/autofiktiivisessä artikkelissani maskuliinisuuden representaatiota, uuden suomalaisen tupakkamerkin julistetta, lama-ajalta 1990-luvun alusta, jolloin uusi mies, ”pehmo”, debytoi perinteisen miehen mallin ja 2000-luvun äijien ja jätkien puristuksessa. Julisteessa poseeraava malli on homoseksuaali, minä. Artikkelissa kysyn, voisiko homo edustaa suomalaista miestä 1990-luvun alussa vai vain esittää tätä. Tarkastelen kuvaa queerilla katseella etsien epäjohdonmukaisuuksia ja vääristymiä sen heteronormatiivisuudessa ja esitän sille vaihtoehtoisia tulkintoja.

Avainsanat: homoseksuaalisuus, maskuliinisuus, heteronormatiivisuus, mainonta, representaatio, autofiktio

Writing this article has been like watching an old film and suddenly recognizing someone vaguely familiar from the past and exclaiming: “Pause it, I know that man!” I examine this “paused” image from an advertisement in November 1991, in which I, a homosexual model, represent a Finnish man (Image 1). The early 1990s is an interesting period in Finland, because it presented in media culture and advertising an image of the “new man,” a “softie” who fell between the traditional Finnish man, a war or a labor hero, and the twenty-first-century dudes and lads (Rossi 2009, 12). Although this image of masculinity is *presented* in the advertisement by a homosexual, I analyze its representation in a heteronormative matrix (Butler 1999); in 1990s Finland, I was not able to *represent* anything else but a heterosexual man and to stay in the closet (see Sedgwick 1990) as a homosexual male model.[1] During all those years in the closet, I could not make myself be seen. Therefore, I started to look for myself in retrospect in the advertising pictures taken of me in which I unambiguously played a straight man. In this article, I analyze this gay model’s succeeding and failing to pass for straight. If I do not pass for straight in the picture, why not? By taking a critical stance against the heteronormativity reproduced and naturalized in and by advertising images (see Saco 1992, 25; Rossi 2003), I aim to find inconsistencies and distortions and make room for alternative interpretations.

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[1] To distinguish presentation from representation I rely on Hall’s (2013, 15) constructionist approach to representation as a production of meaning through language, signs and images, and presentation as an act or performance without “standing for” something or someone else. Therefore, the male figure in the image represents and stands for a Finnish man.

In the 1990s it was impossible to represent homosexuals openly in Finnish media except as objects of laughter or mockery in jokes and sketches. The media could hardly report about us freely and in a positive light, because the “Finnish Section 28” was removed as late as 1999, meaning that encouraging same-sex “unchastity” publicly was illegal, even though homosexuality itself had been decriminalized in 1971. This law made the press self-censor and it was used as an excuse not to publish any neutral or respectful news about homosexuality. One favorable exception to the rule was Leena-Maija Rossi’s article about Tom of Finland in *Helsingin Sanomat* at the time of release of the Downtown campaign in January 1992 (Rossi 1992).

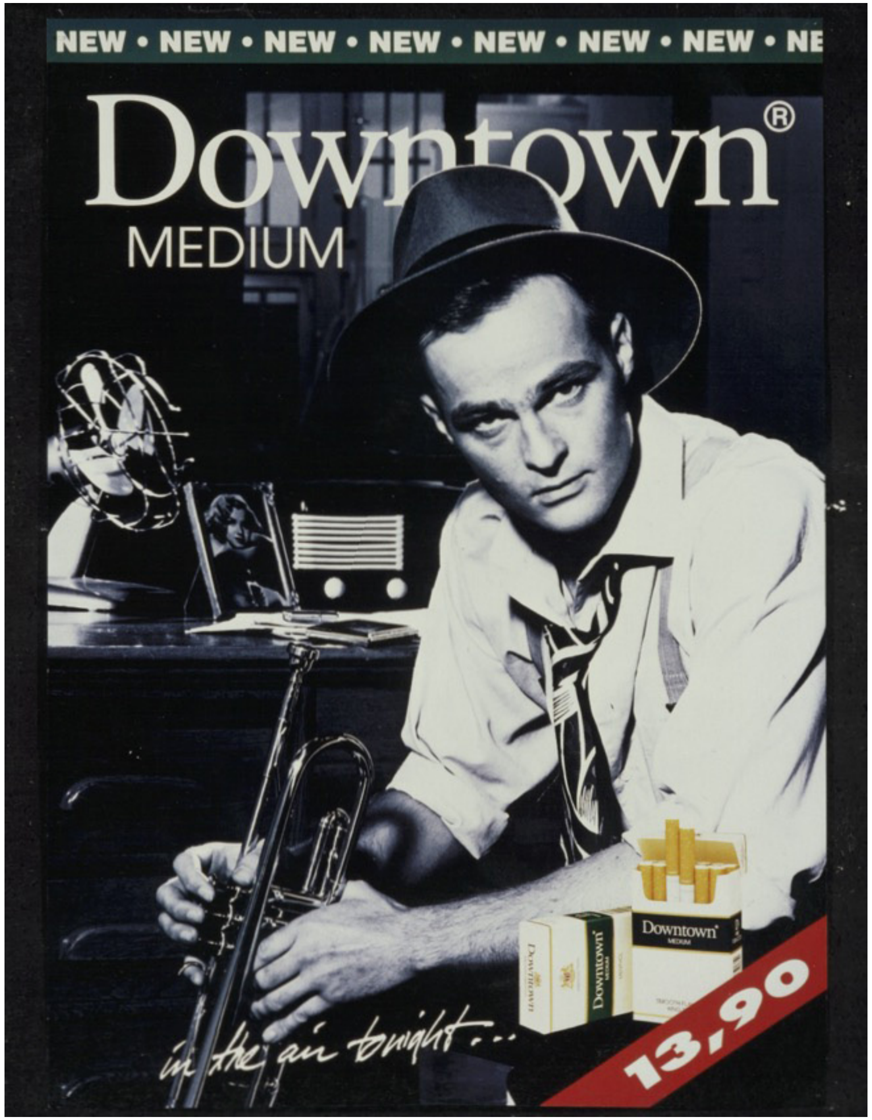

Image 1: Photo by Pekka Järveläinen 1992. Photo of the original poster by Lauri Eriksson and graphic design by Rikhard Luoto 1991.

Downtown, a Finnish cigarette brand of Rettig Ltd., was launched and the campaign poster released in 1992. There is a man and a woman in the picture. The ambiance is dark, like on a stormy November night. And it really was pouring rain. Marilyn lies on the desk, squeezed between the fan and the radio which is on. I am taking five from my performance on stage and looking straight at the camera – at you. Marilyn looks at me, maybe seductively or lovingly. My top shirt button is open, the tie pulled loose, the hat pushed back. Everything shows that at last, it is time to cut loose and let the devil out. The advertisement raises a question about the nature of our relationship. Are we a couple or is Marilyn my fag hag and I, her flamboyant handbag? Am I a *film noir* hero or a flashy designer purse that sparks joy when taken to the theatre, art exhibition, shopping, and late lunch, but is never held at parties and soirées where only married couples or the family are invited, and stored in the wardrobe? The questions raise new ones. What kind of a man is the "Downtown man," what kind of masculinity does he represent in the picture, and what kind of masculinity do I represent? Therefore, I keep asking, if I could represent and not just present "an ordinary Finnish man" or even better "a real man"? These questions are a continuum of my previous research finding, the double standard of the closet: it rejects stereotypical homosexuals (Silvola 2020). In this article, I analyze a representation in which a male model labeled as homosexual passes for straight and not only presents but also represents a Finnish man.

Methodology: My Gaze

If the Downtown man had had a profile on social media, he would probably have stated his relationship status "hard to explain." "They" – he and Marilyn – exists in a world that manifests itself only through images and visual representations (see Vänskä 2006, 12). "They" live literally in a society of spectacle, where people's affairs are mediated by images and life itself has been transformed into a representation (see Debord 2005, 35–36; Vänskä 2006, 12). My poses are based on repetitive performances of gender defined in Butler's performative gender theory (1999) embedded with representations in the sense of re-presenting not reality as such but other representations (Dyer 1993, 2; Nieminen 2006, 25) which I have studied in literature, movies, TV series, music videos, magazines, and fashion catalogs all my life. An image, language, speech, text, and discourse can all be perceived as factors that produce and form our reality (see Vänskä 2006, 13). After the "pictorial turn" (Mitchell 1994/2005) and "visual turn" (Jay 2002), our worldview has changed into an image and our bodies into the canvas or screen where values and attitudes – a good and happy life worth striving for – are projected (Vänskä 2006, 13).

My research material is autobiographical: a photograph of a poster, the emails sent by its photographer Lauri Eriksson, a star photographer of the 1990s Finnish fashion scene (see Onninen 2022), his related memories and the memories I share with him. The photograph is in a plastic bag on page nine in my old model book. The dimensions are 10 x 12 inches. The color picture of the original poster was taken by the photographer Pekka Järveläinen in studio four at United Magazines; the poster itself was photographed by Eriksson in his studio at 17 Union Street, Helsinki. Instantly, the picture takes me back to the moments when I saw the poster at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, at the ship terminal in Stockholm and years later in the window of a tobacco shop, Havanna Aitta in central Helsinki. Then, it takes me back to castings and other occasions where I have showcased my model book and pitched myself thirty years ago.

Today, I examine the photograph with a professional Dörr LL-572 loupe. With a queer gaze I look at it from a temporal distance, in detail and against the grain (see, e.g., Rossi 2003; Karkulehto 2011). I apply heuristic semiotics by reading the signs that carry meanings and codes that support ideologies (Fiske 1990, 61–62). It is methodologically essential that I base my visual analysis on Juha Hurme's (2017) idea of an abstract chasm between person and character. He sees theatre, film, and advertising as all situated in a huge, invisible abstract chasm: two things are always seen as crossing it and merging into one; on stage, screen, celluloid or paper, everyone and everything starts to act, and everyone knows that things do not really happen, they are played out. The magical merger happens when the model becomes one with the character of the poster: the autobiographical "I" that narrates the memoirs, the "I" of the utterance and the "I" that writes this article also merge. The merger destabilizes my narration.

The "Downtown man" image is a result of previous representations of a type, like the title character of *Dick Tracy* (1990), a film directed by and starring Warren Beatty and co-starring Madonna. Based on them we recognize the type, yet it is a presentation of myself. Masculinity has been defined in many ways, such as a category, a configuration, an ideal and a subject position (see Rojola 2004; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) and a Butlerian performance (Butler 1999; Jokinen 2003, 25–27). I approach masculinity as a representation. My performance of masculinity electrified the homo–hetero dichotomy if we assume that gender is real and that men represent masculinity (Nieminen 2006, 25), because the Downtown man was played by a gay man; in the age when homosexuals were still widely classified as a "third" gender. In other words, masculinity was presented by a guy, who experienced being culturally and socially considered as not fully a "real" man, even as a "non-man."

This research article is a Chinese box, a Russian doll (McHale 1987, 112; Füredy 1989, 745), or story-within-the-story (Ricardou 1981), that contains both autobiographical and autofictional material. Without the fiction included in the autobiography, it would not be possible to do research the way I do. Eriksson tells me in his email (2021) that the embedded story that the advertisement is trying to tell us was written by the late Thor Forsskåhl, Rikhard Luoto and himself. Forsskåhl was the leader of the design team of the advertising agency Erva-Latvala. Luoto was the art director, who designed the visual image of the campaign.[2] Eriksson was not only the photographer but also the copywriter. This professional advertising team created a story about the Downtown man and Marilyn where nothing was real (see Genette 1993, 75–77). The signs in fiction do not refer to the real world, but act as self-reflective mirrors (Cohn 2006, 18; see de Man 1983, 17), so our Downtown man does not have an "extratextual existence" but is repeatedly returned to his image (Genette 1993, 25), whereas the fictional character of Marilyn is more complex because she is recognizable as a Hollywood star, originally named Norma Jeane. This story is embedded in another story, an autobiography/autofiction of a model who plays the Downtown man's role. This narrative no longer only refers to itself, but the name of its narrator and protagonist are extratextually connected to the name of a real person and to documented real-life events (Genette 1993, 35, 76–77).

Autobiography and autofiction emphasize authorship. Though Barthes (1977) declared the author dead it does not mean that the author is devoid of meaning. And although Foucault (2010) classified homosexuality as a cultural, historical, and social construction, it does not mean that gay identity has no cultural, historical, and personal consequences (see Dyer 2002, 78). I rely on Dyer's (ibid., 79) idea of authorship and homosexuality as a performance we all do, but only within the terms and discourses available to us, and whose relationship to any assumed self that produces that performance cannot be taken for granted. Likewise, I rely on Butler's (1999, 177) concept of performativity: the body is performed or "made" by ever-repeating performances on top of previous performances; thus, the body is not completely free for any kind of performance but is trapped in its own history. She suggests "that gendered bodies are so many 'styles of the flesh.' These styles all never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities"; she considers gender "as a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning." For Dyer (2002, 79), exploring gay authorship means studying the specific ways in which they are presented in texts. Such an understanding sees the author as a real person, but in a "decentralized" way (Wolff 1981). Therefore, it matters that *I* am writing this text, because of what my material and social positions are in relation to other discourses that I may or may not have access to (Dyer 2002, 79–80). In other words,

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[2] Luoto is no longer in the advertising business, but I have his permission to name him here.

I can write this story because I have certain gay signs and codes – often unknown to non-homosexuals – from the 1990s at my disposal. Moreover, the word within reach at that time, was "gay;" that was the word with which I conceptualized my identity.

In autobiographical discourse, the narrative voice is plural. According to Lejeune (1989, 8–11), in autobiographical discourse the self is always divided, because whenever I say "I" about myself, I am divided into the self of the act of expression and the self of the utterance, the latter representing the character on the level of utterance. In this article, the narrating self is more multilayered. On one level, there is a "model" whose voice belongs to the character in the image, the Downtown man. On the other, diegetic,[3] level is the actual model acting the character for the camera. I aim to describe both truthfully. In autobiographical narrative, a sincere pursuit of the truth is enough, even outright lies and memory distortions tell their own truth about me (ibid., 24–25). My memories change over the years and remembering is an active process involving imagination. I invent my past time and again, but I know how to distinguish a truth from a lie (Hustvedt 2012, 120–121). Therefore, this story is based on the latest version of my memory and though I (re)search myself in a fictional representation which requires imagination, I refrain from fabricating events that never happened or untrue stories but write about something that was impossible to speak out then.

When the voices are decentralized and the corporeal subject is absent from the text, one doubts the stability of narration (Lejeune 1989, 8–11). This instability is the prerequisite for my approach and method. Päivi Koivisto analyzes the division into the self and the other in the autofictional trilogy by Pirkko Saisio, an award-winning Finnish writer, director, and actor. According to Koivisto (2011, 36), in the concreteness of writing, the relationship between oneself and the other can be seen in the distance that the writer takes from the self: do they describe themselves simply as "me" or do they see themselves as something else, which can be expressed in third-person narration? In this article, I examine my relation as writer to my narrating self, but since this is not a work of fiction, I am unable to question or queer the illusion of the existence of my "true self" by mixing narrators (see Karkulehto 2007, 132); I can only allude to the possibility of such a play. In autofiction, where Doubrovsky (1993, 37–42) left one's true self unsolved and replaced it by a myth, I lose the true self in a maze and search for alternative plausible endings of the narrative.

The distance between the author and the narrator is less important to my research than their temporal location: do they have access to the discourses of a certain era and are they plausible narrators of those times? Simultaneously, I make visible the narration itself and the constructedness of meaning formation and knowledge (see Karkulehto 2011, 77). The narration, the way I tell the story, is part of its truth. According to Saisio (2001, 350), the content of a text does not alone determine its truth, but also its form, i.e., structure, language, and patterns of expression. I structure this story by a frame of a few hours at a photo shoot, on which I let my memories accumulate. A significant factor forming the narrative is Dyer's analysis of homosexuality in *film noir* and the maze (Dyer 1993), which becomes a metaphor of my writing. I apply the storyline of *film noir* to my analysis: the hero wanders in a maze trying to solve the case. The meandering and searching tell us more than any ending could. Below, I interpret the poster the way we look at it, zooming in from the big picture to the smallest details.

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[3] I use the term based on Genette's theory: the world of the narrative's main story is referred to as diegesis (*diégèse*) (see Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 116). Diegetic in this context means "in relation to the realm of the story."

At First Sight

He looks like a *film noir* hero to me. The top button of his dress shirt is open, the tie pulled loose, the sleeves are rolled up, suspenders peek out from the folds of the shirt. The hat is pushed to the back of his head. Finally, I notice his trumpet. Eriksson wrote to me in his email on October 12, 2021, at 4:33 p.m. that the visual image of the advertisement was constructed of elements of jazz and film. The nostalgic atmosphere of the big city and its neon lights was linked to the name "Downtown," Petula Clark's eponymous hit, and the rhythm of Bossa Nova. The idea was to depict a big city where the musician is on a break. They wanted it to express the nostalgic mood of a 1950s movie. The expression was finished with toning that added the feeling of nostalgia, longing for the past and *film noir*. (Eriksson 2021.)

The *film noir* style makes the poster particularly compelling for analysis. The first widespread images of gay people were seen in American *film noirs* (Dyer 1993, 52). These representations of homosexuality are typical structured in a maze in big cities and their nightclubs. A hardboiled hero in an unpressed suit, loose tie, hat pulled down low, and unshaven face does not so much solve the mystery as delay resolving it (ibid., 52–57) which emphasizes the genre's ambiguous nature. The *film noir* hero's ambivalence is a perfect match with the Downtown man's ambiguity; the looks of the latter repeat the former's appearance up to the top button and loosened tie. The only difference in costuming between the two is the position of the hat. When the poster is visually positioned in the *film noir* genre, its relationship to the representation of homosexuals actualizes. For Dyer (1993, 60), homosexual characters even define the entire genre despite their supporting role:

> [I]t is clearly only in a minority of *film noirs* that gay characters appear, yet their absence from all other types of film and the caution with which even *film noir* had to introduce them suggest that they do none the less constitute a defining feature of *film noir* taken as a whole.

Homosexual characters formed a negative to the protagonist, the hero. Sleek and well-groomed gay men were opposites of rugged, stubbled, and careless straight he(te)roes. (Dyer 1993, 60.) In the Downtown man's character, a gay man is merged with the hero. His costumes, self and milieu repeat the *film noir* type of a hero, but his smooth face does not have the roughness that defines the original paragon. His hat is not pulled down over the eyes but is pushed back to frame the face. At a deeper level, the hero's reluctance to solve mysteries, the lack of straightforwardness, creates a distortion in the prevailing ideal masculinity and is thus a possible sign of queer that connects the hero to the Downtown man. When hegemonic masculinity threatens other ways of being a man by making them obscure and vague, *film noir* and thus the Downtown man can be seen as an extension of traditional hegemonic masculinity (see Nieminen 2006, 25; Connell 1995, 80–81; Sipilä 1994, 20–21).

I managed to escape the casting stage of the Downtown advertisement production process. Before they set it up, Luoto saw my picture in Eriksson's portfolio and said: "That's the guy." Therefore, I did not need to queue with all the other male models in town to get the gig. Choosing a model is expensive for an advertiser. Henrik C. Le Bell, the CEO of Rettig Ltd., said that launching a new international brand requires a huge amount of money. One must do market research, find the right flavor and invest in advertising (see Iivonen 1995). Statistical analyses show that advertisers favored traditional male stereotypes at the time of the Downtown campaign (Ganahl et al. 2003; Vigorito & Curry 1998). If there had been a casting, the makeup I would have needed to wear would have been more abstract and not so much about looks but attitude associated with hegemonic masculinity: aggression, independence, rationality, activity, intelligence, and strength (Forward & Torres 1989, 143; Grönfors

1994, 67). Furthermore, my face would have had to showcase an ability or willingness for competition, emotional coldness, self-control, hardness, tendency to seek adventures and fights, desire for power and control (Miedzian 1992, xx–xxiii). Likewise, it would have to exude economic, social, erotic and physical strength, and an orientation more to work than to home and family (Niskanen 1996, 147), emotionally impenetrable and aloof (Steele 2020, 11–12). In sum, I would exhibit the palette of the "Masculine Norms Inventory" (Mahalik et al., 2017; Parent & Moradi, 1998): winning, dominance, emotional control, being a playboy, risk-taking, self-reliance, violence, primacy of work, power over women, pursuit of status, and heterosexual self-presentation. All these myriad elements were part and parcel of the intended Downtown man's act.

By far the best known and utmost stereotypical man in advertising is the Marlboro man, the archetype of all cigarette ads (Salo 1997, Chapter 10.4.2). Men take great risks at the expense of their health and lives to be rewarded with honor (Kortteinen 1992, 47, 60–61); who would embody this better than a dusty cowboy. The lonely rider risks his life to achieve glory in dangerous rodeo races with wild horses. The work of a cowboy is hard physical labor that requires a great deal of courage. Its equivalent is the lumberjack, familiar from Finnish traditional cultural male imagery. Instead of horses, he wrestles pinewoods. Conditions are harsh; both men are literally living at the mercy of the weather. According to advertising research (Heiskala & Luhtakallio 2000, 21–22) men return to the traditional male roles and stereotypes of the 1950s in 1990s commercials; women had expanded their lives since the 1970s, but men burrow into the bunkers to defend themselves when confronted with the changes demanded by women. In the age of the Downtown man, the only arena of advertisements left completely for men is social status and work. Controversially, the new man, the Downtown man, is a performing artist, a musician with a trumpet. In the deep economic depression of the early 1990s, the ideal masculinity of a Finnish man is at a historical turning point, where a new man, a softie, debuts alongside the traditional male image before the macho lads and dudes (Rossi 2009, 12) of the twenty-first century begin to take over. He is earning his living, too, although in Eriksson's words, "taking five" (Eriksson 2021). Finally, life is no longer just sweat and hard labor, it has moments of rest. And not only that, but free-time and entertainment.

For me, modeling is not a glamorous, high-status career. Our work is considered stereotypically "gay" like that of male hairdressers, waiters, and dancers. When I walk shoulder-to-shoulder with a blond, blue-eyed breathtakingly handsome German model, Andreas, down the runway at the legendary nightclub Charles XII in Helsinki in 1991, a drunken yuppie wearing a limp blazer and garish silk shirt shouts from the audience: "Gays off the stage!" It takes years to understand that the exhortation is not addressed to us in person, but to the category we represent, male models in general. It is a coincidence that indeed we both are gay. Not *all* male models are gay, however. In my long career as a model, which lasted for twenty-five years from 1988 to 2013 (see Uitto 2016), I never played a gay man per se. For a fact, I was a homosexual model booked to present a straight man.

The real eye magnet of the picture is the face, as it is placed in the golden ratio and is brightly lit. I am a standard male model, a provocateur: young, sleek, and splendid, sexually attractive, instigating a viewer to desire (see Cortese 1999, 52–57). More specifically, I am *the face*. The most important part of it is my jaw, which is just as angular as it ought to be (see Rossi 2003, 43). The thinner I am, the hollower my cheeks are and the more clearly the angle of my jawline will come out – when I zoom in very close to the image, I can see a thin streak of light outlining my jaw from the shadow. However, my mandibles are not strikingly wide. They are just wide enough.

Nothing on the model's face can be too exaggerated. Eyes cannot be too large, lips too thick, cheekbones too high or jawbone too wide. Another criterion is the symmetry of the face (Balsamo 1996, 60–61). My nose is slightly curved to the left, but I can hide it by turning my face to the right angle with the camera. In the picture my face is perfectly symmetrical. In the 1990s, I muse in a flashback, they were less often looking for a face. Everyone wanted the body, beefy meat, muscles, the utmost markers of masculinity (see Cortese 1999, 58–59; Dyer 2002; Lahti 1992), and castings became humiliating and began to resemble cattle shows in every way: "Take your clothes off. You can leave your underpants on."

In the 1990s gay scene, type and style are everything, so the clothes that I take off play a big role in more than one scene. I do not represent any of the most common gay stereotypes, a man wearing glasses and a cardigan, a leather type, a bear in a checked flannel shirt or a self-tanned bleached blond in a tank top bought in Ibiza. As a professional model, I get access to the latest fashions long before they arrive at stores, set a trend, and end up on everyone. My style is not actually "gay," but it would be gay to be so voguish if modeling were not part of my personality. It is even written in my employment contract with the modeling agency Paparazzi that I must always be fashionable because I represent the agency in and out of work. Hence, my style is within the reach of few in the hierarchical system of class, appreciation, and consumption, but it is not quite as dubious as it could be on someone else. It depends on the finances and assets of who can wear what and thus who can be what (Holliday 2001, 220), yet the status of the most wanted piece of candy in the chocolate box cannot be bought. The right clothes on the wrong type do not "pass;" one must match the clothes, just like they must fit, in more ways than one (Clarke & Turner 2009, 271). Nevertheless, the exchange rate of one currency is even higher than style: hetero likeness. Hetero-like, manly men are on the top, the most sought after; effeminate men least wanted (Nardi 2000). Therefore, each new photograph is a new concrete proof on top of the previous ones, not only for me but for everyone to see. Perhaps, I subconsciously believe that when enough evidence is deposited in me, I will eventually become what I am performing, and others will take me as such.

At the beginning of my career, my facial muscles get tired quickly. Numerous repetitions of the same expression or emotional state dull the expression, make it look fake. Little by little, I learn to use my facial muscles and sustain the intensity in my gaze, uphold the emotional charge, the illusion of authenticity and true feelings. My acting skills evolve. Other models practice in front of a mirror. If they see a facial expression that would work for them in a magazine, they go to the bathroom to practice until they know how to keep it on their face. Instead of doing this, I examine the photographs, the contact sheets. I analyze every little screen. What kind of expressions do I use? What is the illumination like? What does each angle and pose look like? The most important skill of a model is to know what each facial expression looks like, and which expressions work in a still image. In addition to improving my facial fine motor control, I need to be able to find just the right angles in relation to the camera and, above all, know how my face refracts light. The shape of the face and the color of the skin affect what light is most favorable to them. Over time, I develop a new "sense" and almost automatically approach the right angle with the light and camera.

On the focus point, going into the role requires careful preparation. I must become aware and eliminate all my effeminate gestures. I must be bold and broad, not narrow, my knees should be far apart, my shoulders look wide (see Steele 2020, 11–12) and my postures should take as much space as possible. Contrary to women who exaggerate the angle of their hips in their poses, my hip should be straight. My chest and face should be towards the camera and indicate power and fearlessness. I have the exact same two moods to choose as the Canadian fashion photographer and former model Gabriel Steele (2020, 11–12): emotionally impenetrable and aloof detachment. My hands must not embellish, my wrists must not be loose but rigid and exude strength (see Rossi 2003, 107). The hands are as expressive as the face: their movements are either masculine or feminine. What needs extra careful control is a cliché, the little finger. It should not stick out from the other fingers as an allusive sign of gayness but stay in line with the others. I avoid straightening any of my fingers fully and always keep them at least slightly bent. I usually make a manly fist. Stylists often give me a cigarette. I exaggerate when I wrap my fingers around it. Sometimes they put a butt dangling from one corner of my mouth, like in the movies where the hero does not use his hand when smoking. A skilled actor and *film noir* hero like Humphrey Bogart can even speak with a cig on his lips – I cannot even smile with it. Maybe they do not want me to smile but look stone-faced. Smiling is always a risk; I might look more obsequious than triumphant.

The image is both the photographer's and my imagination. Only Eriksson does not photograph me, but his own idea, I am just a medium. In my mind, I go through the imagery from Paul Newman to Clint Eastwood and James Dean, the men far enough in the past. I imagine I am Paul. Clint is "too much of a man," James too "rock." The photographer shows society a mirror: this is the kind of man you want. But they do not want me. They want an image, figurative abstraction. Therefore, my image does not portray me, an anonymous model, but cultural perceptions of masculinity and manhood. As the Downtown man, I do not express myself, but represent common gender roles (see Schudson 1984, 211); I am a type, part of a larger machinery of the advertising and marketing industry, yet in front of the camera, I want to make people fall in love with *me*. According to Jokinen (2000, 217), in the media, I can create a fictional archetype of ideal masculinity even without possessing any real power. Even if I had it, the demands of ideal masculinity are so impossible to achieve that they can only be pursued through (images classified as) fiction. In real life I have no high social status but relationships which do not last, no children or family life, and social opprobrium (see Dyer 1993, 84) and my "sad young man's" (see Dyer 1993: 73–74; Karkulehto 2011, 40) life expectancy is short. Therefore, modeling represents public, published testimonies that I can present the ideal masculinity of the era, even though I am unable to attain its unachievable hypermasculine standards (see Jokinen 2000, 217). As cold comfort, I at least can pass for straight, compile evidence of being hetero-like and as the sweetest revenge, the image is eventually stored into a cultural catalog, a mosaic whose purpose is to depict the idealized man of the era.

As a male model I am a paradox. The paradox of homosexuality is defined by Tony Adams (2011, 113–122): to come or not to come out of the closet and when. The situation is made complex by the fact that we all know that they know, and that they know that I know they know, but we still must pretend that none of us know. Male models suffered from this paradox in the 1990s, when it was even more tortuous. It was not a question of the sexuality of real people but of the label stamped on the stereotype. In other words, while there was at least a "well-established reputation" and a "strong suspicion" if not a "sure knowledge" of homosexuality, we were expected to represent the ideal straight Finnish masculinity – convincingly. This paradox within a paradox occurred in the eyes and mind of the viewer as the male models were "known" as gay but "read" as straight. D. A. Miller (1988) defined homosexuality as an open secret, not spoken aloud but known or at least suspected and talked about behind our backs. My suspected homosexuality created a form of cultural otherness that had to kept behind closed bedroom curtains. Paradoxically, according to Miller, monitoring the closet door and keeping me in there required some degree of publicity. Therefore, even though some "suspected" or "knew" that I was gay, I had to pretend to maintain the facade so that they could pay my photograph the compliment of believing and swallow my passing-for-straight act. The model and character merge into one in the eyes of the audience. "I" disappear from the picture.

Next: The Title

I look at the photograph like watching a paused movie and imagine the big screen. The transverse strip of the word "new" repeated on the top of it gives the impression of a celluloid film, reinforced by the dots between the words. This representative nature of the poster is enhanced by its temporal distance. The campaign was launched in the early 1990s, but the era of the image is 1950s. The composition, style, scenography, costumes, lighting and toning of the image all refer to Hollywood, to the heart of the entertainment industry. This is all not only positioned in leisure time, but within the industrial mega-imaging machine (de Lauretis 1984, 37–38, 84–86; Vänskä 2006, 41), that forms us by pouring unending representations on us.

The Downtown campaign was designed for international locations: ship terminals, airports, and tax-free shops. Therefore, English is an obvious language choice. It highlights the North American flavor of the ad and grants the Downtown man the place of Marlboro man's successor. Linguistically, the name connects to the Anglo-American world. From very early on, North American advertisements had the strongest influence on Finnish advertising (Heinonen 1999, 379; Kortti 2003, 200). In this case, the number 13.90 transgresses the languages. The currency cannot be sterling or the US dollar because 13.90 a pack would be way too much. Therefore, the number must be in Finnish. With my Dörr LL 572 magnifying glass, I can see the words AMERICAN TASTE, SMOOTH FLA[VOR] and KING [SIZE] on the packs – in English. The words FLAVOR and SIZE are covered by a red banner. On the beach, a red flag warns of strong currents or dangerous weather. In formula races, its wave stops the competition. In the nineteenth century, it became a symbol of the French Revolution, and of resistance. A red banner in a cigarette ad is ambivalent: it simultaneously attracts attention and indicates danger. From a queer perspective, it may even warn about a sin when it covers the equivocal reference to something king size swelled into capitals. So, do the words even refer to the penis, which is bashfully covered with a warning sign?

Like the liminal spaces where the ad is to be displayed, the stage of the image is a transit area. When the Downtown man's relationship to Marilyn is perceived as a mystery and the image as a maze, the actual focus point becomes relevant because it adds to the ambiguity of the ad. The character is not photographed in his real place of work, on the jazz club stage. He is resting in the back room, out of the spotlight in the dark, in noir-like illumination. Nevertheless, both stage and back room are located in the consumer's leisure time. He plays on stage when the audience enjoys dancing, drinking, flirting, coupling. Suggestively, they are smoking better cigarettes, *Downtown medium*. The world of the picture lies outside the traditional, binary, and middle-class post-war world order of home and honorable workplace, an office. The suit, collared shirt, stylish art deco tie and hat might make a business-like impression if the open top button, the loose tie, and the whole setting did not tell the viewer that they had been taken on a drive into the world of *film noir*.

The English text and Hollywood-like visual display problematize the national identity of the advertisement. Berlant's (1997, 15–23) idea of national heterosexuality includes the many ways of structuring citizenship that heterosexual intimacy advocates. This national sexuality needs constant support from institutions, narratives, pedagogies, social practices (ibid., 17) and foremost, advertising (Rossi 2003). The hegemonic way of organizing society based on heterosexual intimacy, the family, and the economic structures revolving around them inevitably produces an outside area called queer (Hyttinen 2020, 64). The English language and the Hollywood theme transgress the borderline of Finnish national heterosexuality. It is unclear where it is geographically located. The transgression is also highlighted by the final placements of the poster, the airports and ship terminals, which are intermediate, transit, and out-of-place spaces. This “nobody’s-land” may have more room to resist the heteronormative social order – here, the compelling norms are not as tight as our everyday life.

Only then: Marilyn

Would you have noticed Marilyn if I had not mentioned her? The picture features two human figures. When a person appears in an advertisement, it is always a matter of gender advertising (Rossi 2003, 11). Men and women are expected to be specific and behave accordingly to culturally coded patterns (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990, 215). Marilyn’s image on the bureau opens up a variety of interpretations. In the context of a jazz club, my first thought is Billy Wilder’s 1959 movie *Some Like It Hot,* with a strong queer dimension, where Marilyn’s character Sugar Kane is the soloist of a female jazz orchestra. In the context of the cigarette ad and as an association with another icon, the Marlboro man, I think of the movie *Bus Stop* directed by Joshua Logan in 1956. Marilyn plays an anonymous singer who dreams of Hollywood stardom but is lassoed and finally ringed by a wild cowboy. These two are among Marilyn’s best known performances on the big screen. Nevertheless, we should not forget how women have traditionally been the object of the male gaze in media imagery (Karkulehto 2011, 109). According to Dyer (2002, 118–120), Marilyn’s appeal was based on the fact that she embodied what the discourses of her era defined important: sex and sexuality. From pin-up pictures to movie screens, her public image was built entirely through sexuality and sex appeal. In the 1950s she became a sign of sex and sexuality – from a male perspective. This was not only because of her movies, but because of her pose on the cover of the first issue of *Playboy* magazine founded by Hugh Hefner in 1953. She was not just the cover girl but also the centerfold girl. The centerfold photo was not taken for *Playboy*, but by pinup photographer Tom Kelley in 1949, when cash-strapped, jobless Marilyn consented to pose nude. *Playboy’s* first issue sold 50,000 copies and the magazine was profitable from the start. Marilyn’s reward for the picture was $50 to fix her car. About the photo shoot, she later said that the only thing on was the radio. The decade made her the most worshiped sex symbol in the world, the object of gaze above all others and a representation of hyperfemininity, not a real woman named Norma Jeane Mortenson (1926–1962). Marilyn’s picture is thus itself a representation layered from a person to an icon and a transgression between reality and representation.

On the poster, Marilyn is a *mise-en-abyme*, a picture within the picture, in which her representation multiplies recursively. Embedded Marilyn can be seen in Rosi Braidotti’s view in interview with Judith Butler: a prisoner of her body where the Downtown man is free from his body and entitled to transcendental subjectivity (Butler & Braidotti 1994, 38–39). As a picture within the picture Marilyn is trapped within the frames. Moreover, she is not the main target of the gaze and does not make eye contact with the viewer. The frame is set so that she looks at the man, even from below, while he makes direct eye contact with the viewer on the same level. In the hierarchy of gaze directions, Marilyn is positioned subordinate to him, in accordance with the heteronormative order of the era, that is, to look up at the man. The size of the characters (see Goffman 1979, viii), makes them a disproportionate couple in multiple ways. The discrepancy is not only between the world-famous icon and the random musician, but between the identifiable Marilyn representing herself and the anonymous male model representing whoever. In other words, there is a relationship between a public figure and an unknown, formed through images and therefore on a different diegetic level. The fact that Marilyn is a *mise-en-abyme*, situated in a different diegesis, makes her unreachable in the realm of the poster; she is more of an idea, thought or memory than flesh and blood. Consequently, the ratio of representations is complex. The sex symbol shrinks from the object of admiration and desire into a mere recognizable, but not pleasurable component to prop up the man who dominates the entire screen.

As a portrait on the musician's desk, where we are used to seeing a photo of a wife, Marilyn highlights the gap between the icon, in this case materialized ideal femininity, and the image of the random man. That would not be the case if Marilyn were not recognized all over the world as herself, the movie star. In this poster, her image refers to a real person, the Hollywood star Marilyn, born Norma Jeane. The viewer knows as well as you that Marilyn/Norma Jeane had died 30 years earlier, before I was even born, but in the realm of the image, she is at the peak of her career. As such a complex figure, she represents the idea of a woman that is unattainable to a man. The absence of an engagement or wedding ring highlights this symbolism; through a heteronormative magnifying glass, the absence of a ring on my ring finger stands out like a neon sign. In the hierarchy of masculinity regulated by heteronormativity, the unmarried musician playing in underground clubs is way below the middle rungs of the social ladder. The cultural imagery and always-already representations of cultural products offer many possible explanations of a man who has not "got a woman" for himself. Maybe he is losing his earnings at the game table, maybe he is drinking them down, maybe he is a lady-killer, or maybe even one of "those men"? With a queer gaze I can see that he would look down on her – if he bothered to look. The fact that he turns his gaze away from the woman, and not just from any woman but Marilyn, can be seen as an eminent symbolic gesture, a sign of resistance to heteronormativity. The Downtown man looking away from Marilyn Monroe herself is a queer gesture in a heteronormative set-up.

Finally: The Instrument

Despite all, there are cracks in the image. After the launch, Eriksson gets feedback that the model looks like he has never held a trumpet. When I look at the picture against the grain and search for cracks in its heteronormativity, the clumsiness is the most obvious. The viewer may rightly ask, is this man as clumsy with his manhood as he is with his tool? Is he equally unsecure and incompetent with *all* his instruments? He certainly does not know how to play, so everything else must be pretending too. His incompetence can be interpreted not only in terms of sexual performance but in the context of *film noir*. It is analogical with the hero's impotence to solve mysteries. This distortion is framed by how he is not presented. He does not appear as a family man, a supporter and provider, reading a newspaper, as a mighty breadwinner, an office father, a bit lost and out-of-place at home (see Rossi 2003, 115; Hattunen 2006, 28). True, nothing is real in the picture. Everything is sheer acting. Indeed, I had never held a trumpet, let alone played one. The picture is situated in the 1950s, when I was not even born. The clothes and hat are not mine. And I do not really represent the prevailing ideal masculinity and heteronormativity. I am gay. I have never even smoked[4].

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[4] Robert Norris (1929–2019), the original Marlboro man from the 1950s and 1960s ads, was not a model but an authentic, tall, and lanky cowboy and a horse breeder from Colorado, USA, who was originally discovered by advertising executives in a photo with his friend John Wayne. He never smoked cigarettes. (See Padilla 2019.)

My performance is to a large extent based on the instructions of the photographer, expectations of the paying client, view of the make-up artist, wardrobe and hairstylist. To portray an ideal, I must perform the masculine gender role in a precise way. Even if I painted all the colors of masculinity on my face, the makeup of manliness (to which I alluded earlier) would not be enough. The core of correct presentation is dominance. Whether a man dominates a woman or another man is not so relevant, as in both cases the dominant man lands safely in the zone of normality (see Bersani 1987, 197–222). The concept of dominance – physical, economic, or sexual – thus makes the paradox within the paradox of a male model partially comprehensible. Dominance implicitly reveals that the boundaries of normality can stretch as far as to include the sexual dominance of another man; homosexuality is thus acceptable when it is dominant and active. What is particularly ambiguous about the performance of the 1990s male model is that while he is suspected of being gay, viewers are most concerned about the lack of dominance in his performance. A dominant gay might still do, but a submissive and passive gay would not.

Advertisers and viewers are driven by fear of deviating from gender norms and a ban on male femininity (Garst & Bodenhausen 1997; Martin & Gnoth 2009, 356). "Abnormal" gender and male femininity are comprehended as signs of homosexuality when visible to others. Male femininity is acceptable to some degree without risking or losing manliness if it is compensated with rough enough outward appearance or behavior, or if it is loosened at home, behind closed curtains. (Rossi 2003, 105.) Basically, what is prohibited from view is submissive homosexuality, which, in a nutshell, appears as a lack of masculinity (Connell 1995, 143). It is a paradox, because sexual orientation is outwardly invisible to others, and we can always choose whether we express our orientation with culturally coded and recognized signs. In the 1990s, this signifying system, homo–hetero dichotomy, was a zero-sum game that served as a key criterion in valuing masculinity.

In terms of masculinity, the most dominant part of the body for a man, the penis, is not visible in the picture even though its cultural significance has swelled to extravagance. It is impossible to see even a shadow or bulge of it. Therefore, we must imagine it. When the penis is transformed into a sign, the phallus symbolizes all the power, control, and superiority associated with masculinity. The psychoanalysts' term phallic masculinity is sometimes equated with Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. (Jokinen 2000, 229.) Susan Bordo (1999, 89) argues that the larger phallus has come to stand for a generic male superiority over women, other men, and other species; as such, the desire for larger penises has been disguised, through advertising, pornography, television, and books, as a need to "measure up" – to fall in with certain expectations of modernity's scopic fetishism (Mangham & Lea 2018, 2). I go even further. I equate the function of the penis not with penetration or ejaculation but urination. Since my teen years I have experienced how hegemonic masculinity is concentrated into the code of peeing standing up, a performance. Young men construct and perpetuate masculinity norms in interactions with their male peers (Pascoe 2007) who exert influence above and beyond that which men experience from the media (Nielson et al. 2022, 9). The peeing while standing code is extremely homosocial because it is demonstrated in front of other men. In the age of the Downtown man, public toilets have urinals, long troughs without partitions. There are no front walls in the toilet booths of army garrisons. According to Jokinen (2003, 15–16), men must differentiate themselves from women and find their own place in the mutual hierarchies of men by competing with other men: showing off one's penis is a key gear in this competition; even little boys learn this show-like ceremony in the "who wees the farthest" competitions. However, homosocial performances of male potence are in danger of being eroticized (Jokinen 2000, 224); when peeing in front of other men, it is almost palpable. Nevertheless, it must be performed standing, because in a sitting position the penis and its size are impossible to show and compare.

Therefore, men stand; women and gays sit.

When Eriksson replies “play with it and hold it as you feel most natural” to my question about what he wants me to do with the instrument, I feel the demands of masculinity pulsing in my pants. The whole concept of manhood is encapsulated into the code of peeing, the strong imperative to pee standing and the prohibition to sit on the toilet – at least not in front of other men. To sit down is sissy stuff, and thus a sign of being gay. This code is activated each time I step in front of the backdrop and set myself on the focus point. I feverishly ponder how to express with a mere facial gesture that I pee standing up. I feel immense fear, downright horror, when I think that the camera could snatch some fleeting, out-of-control micro-expression or gesture that would reveal the truth that I sometimes sit down to pass water. Not only that, but there would be evidence: a photograph! When I imagine the Downtown man without the trumpet, I clearly see him sitting on the porcelain seat. The homo–hetero dichotomy is activated to the highest degree in the question of what errand he is on.

The End: Stone Face vs. Softie

As the opposite to the Marlboro man who embodies the hardness, danger, and independence of work, the smoother Downtown man becomes very popular – to my great surprise. Everybody wants the poster and prints of him run out. Even Eriksson hangs him framed on the wall of his studio. The popularity can be explained by the fact that he represents the transition from a granite-faced, weather-beaten hardness to a softer, indoor-type, entertainment-seeking masculinity and male ideal. My assignments never question the white hetero assumption. Of course, I could never perform anything other than Caucasian. White, young, healthy, straight. They never tell me to perform gay, to show that I am into men. I have my suspicions though, maybe the case is not that straightforward. What if I am chosen because I do not so obviously look straight but they just do not tell me?

The work of musicians is not considered physically hard like cutting logs or roping cattle. Jazz music is not particularly mainstream in Finland, nor the music of oppressed Black people as in the US, but resonates as elitist. The musician is supported by a significant amount of social power. He is an object of attention. In modern terms, he has valuable assets: attention capital, which is marketable (Franck 2019). As a musician he is a celebrity. Celebrity capital, based on the media, enables him to cut across social fields. The media is a form of “meta-capital” that exerts influence in multiple social fields, giving celebrities a wide range of locations where they can exercise their power. This celebrity capital can be traded in for economic capital. (Driessens 2013, 13–14.) He plays as part of the band, “one of the boys.” Naturally, he gets his fair share of the gang’s homosocial power and possesses gender capital that acts as a hybrid of cultural and symbolic capital and hegemonic gender expectations defined as “the value afforded contextually relevant presentations of gendered selves” (Bridges 2009, 84). As a musician the Downtown man is an interpreter of emotions, not necessarily an expert feeling them himself. He controls his own face and emotions and what the audience feels. Therefore, he has power over the feelings of others. Where the Marlboro man won in physical strength, the Downtown man wins as ruler of the emotions of the entire herd.

I meet Eriksson at the model agency, Paparazzi’s. As we sit on the couch and sip coffee, I hint that I would be more than happy to continue working with him after the campaign. He replies: “Kari, you’re not a model type, you look like a hero,” and never uses me again. After 30 years, he writes to me pondering on his unorthodox approach to fashion and advertising:

> My early photographs from 1989 to 1992 were more portraits than fashion images. It was important that the performers did not look like “models” in the traditional sense. Hence, I distinguished

> the “real person in the picture” from the “model.” [...] A bit the same way a figure may be drawn from a living model, but it does not necessarily portray an actual person. I adapted the idea and aesthetics of portraits into my photographs. I chose performers that fitted into the fluid conception of identity: a person with changing or conflicting identity. (Eriksson 2022.)

With these words on the fluidity of identity in mind, I take one last look at the photograph with my loupe. The *mise-en-abyme* starts to worry me. All these years I have believed that it is Marilyn in the picture. But now, I can no longer be sure. With a closer look she could be any young blonde. So, there are cracks everywhere and no solid ground underfoot anywhere. The relationship between me and Marilyn was pure imagination; it was all about me and my ability to represent a Finnish man. The story had a maze and a case, which I tried to delay solving and confuse, even misleading the reader – you. *Film noir* as a metaphor for writing worked until the end.

Conclusion

Autobiographical material and autofiction as method inevitably make us aware of authorship and narration. I used the maze of *film noir* as a metaphor for writing and to develop the means of narration: to prolong solving the puzzle. To do that, I was in search of multiplicity, gaps, distortions, paradoxes, and contradictions, in sum cracks in the heteronormative picture, not only to make visible the structuredness of the prevailing hegemony, question its naturalness and make room for alternative meanings arising from the image but also to show how our standpoint affects what we see. The hardboiled facts I presented – the real places, dates, photograph, newspaper articles – in addition to the memoirs of my micro-experiences and related feelings provided a base for new interpretations, the criterion being not their ultimate but their partial plausibility. The fate of the story is in the hands of the reader. If you correctly identified the female character in the picture from the start, you read the story differently; you read another story.

On paper, I structured the story the way we look, meandering intuitively from the big picture towards the smallest details. This gaze and the embedding and embedded narratives based on it found many cracks in the heteronormative. The most significant finding about the Downtown man ad is its ambiguity. The localization, language, prevailing perceptions of masculinity, and the double paradox of male models at the time; the hero’s tendency to mess up the mystery rather than solve it; and the code of peeing. The tension in the Downtown man’s character, which combines traits from a *film noir* hero and a gay man, show the extreme control and bluffing that a homosexual male model had to practice in the early 1990s. My own micro-experiences are testimonies of what was not allowed to be seen: not homosexuality per se, but male femininity interpreted automatically as submissive homosexuality. On closer inspection, the seemingly smooth and dapper Hollywood image is full of cracks.

I performed my analysis in the chasm between person and character, between the narrator’s, writer’s, and researcher’s voices. The whole structure collapses like a house of cards without a reader who swallows the bait and sees something which does not exist, Marilyn. Without a reader engaged in my lie, the mirror created by the article does not reflect, the reader does not see themself in it, but the image remains “the other” or at least blurry. If you were seduced by the story, it showed not only how we look at representations, but also produced new knowledge about the closet. Seeing every young blonde as Marilyn, the double paradox of male models – “knowing” them as gay, but “reading” them as straight – is a mirror that shows us ourselves; representations themselves are unreliable. What matters is the image we form. This quality of representation reveals how one might get lost in the image photographed and developed in the closet and how searching for what was once lost in the image is pointless.

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