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All the Men Who
**Think
They Can
Be Me**

Mary Ellen Carroll



No other country and no other artist has produced a tradition of major aesthetic debate to compare with that which is unfolding in America at this moment. Here is a key work of a great controversy between capitalism and aesthetics over economics and art assembled in a single volume. It does not form a disparate collection, but a continuous, interlinked proposition on the notion of a work of art.

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This is a key work in the study of criticality, post-conceptualism, masculinity, performance and self-consciousness, and of many closely related general questions.... It is genuinely an indispensable volume.

Robin Williams

onestar press mary ellen carroll all the men who think they can be me

IRON JOHN

A Book About Men

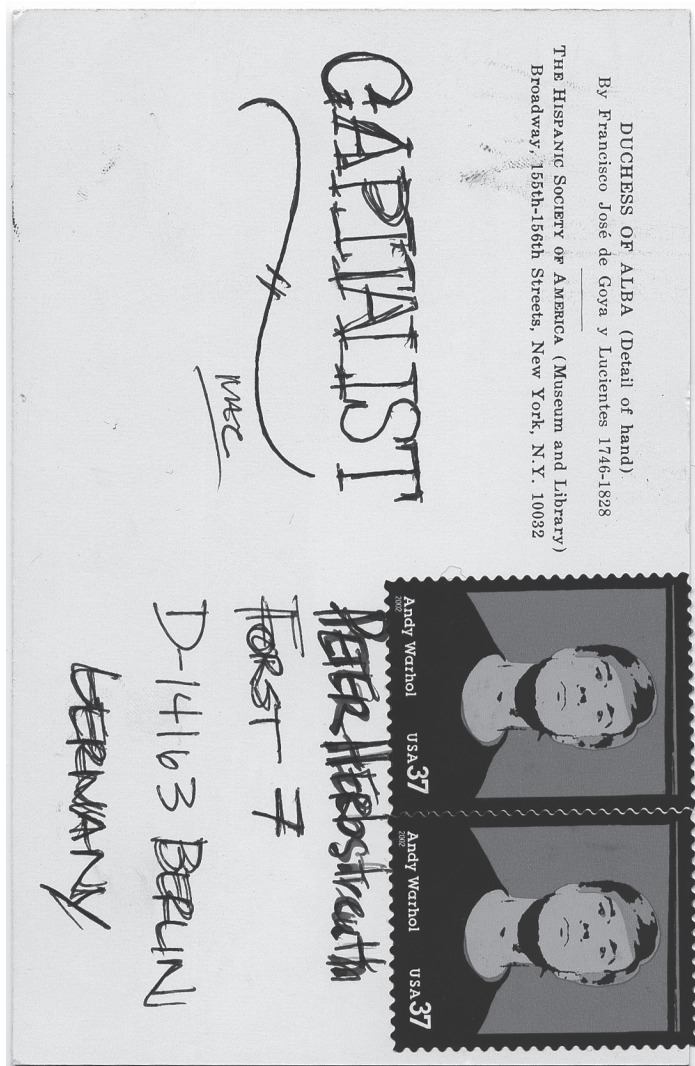
IDENTIFICATION (Independent Film)

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August 11th, 12th, and 13th at MEC, 249 W. 34th
(btw 7th & 8th ave), 7th Fl., NYC 10001 (if not able
to attend send pic/resume) Female or Feminine Male
(28 to 40) tall (5'10+), lanky, brunette, hazel eyes,
intelligent (post- post university or life a +), dry wit,
not so ugly, strong character, for role as post-
conceptual artist in New York. Accents are welcome
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ROBERT BLY



I AM A MAN WHO THINKS THAT I CAN BE ME.
(Another exposé or an other thing exposed.)

One thing that you never knew about me is that I am a man who thinks that I can be me, and I have a pen name: Peter Herbstreuth. I'm Peter Herbstreuth. And you're taking it good. I always thought you'd get pissed off at me for that. In fact I wrote the column for years and just drifted into this, decided that I'd like to do a little comedy on the side, and you liked me, and I thought I was doing good, so what the hell, a few write-ups don't hurt anybody. And you're taking it good, that's lovely.

I want you to know this too. That I've never been in jail. I've never been arrested.

BRUCE AND CARROLL

What you just read and what you are going to read has not been written by me. It does not necessarily mean that I am not the one who wrote those words. Those words, except for my name, are from a page that was torn out of a book that is a transcription of a Lenny Bruce concert. This page was mailed to me from New York in an envelope with four Gary Indiana LOVE postage stamps by the artist Mary Ellen Carroll. The entire page was deliberately scratched out, except for that section, *I have a pen name and I have never been arrested*. I wasn't familiar with Lenny Bruce until that moment. Two weeks after I received that envelope I received a box with a photocopy of a receipt from a record store, Footlight Records in the amount of \$43.45 US and a three-record set of Lenny Bruce's final performance in San Francisco. The week following that I received a VHS tape of that same performance. (I haven't been able to watch the tape because it was a bootleg recording in NTSC format and in good old Europe we use a PAL system, and if that statement presupposes to you that I wouldn't be able to buy an NTSC system, I apologize.)

were who lived there. What can you tell people when they take you around the house?

"Yes. That, um, that's really a lovely closet. I like the way the towels are folded. That's pretty hip." And then they have the piano, that nobody plays, with the lace on it, and the wax fruit. And I figured out, the whole function of these pianos is that eight-by-ten picture, that nitwit in the army saluting, you know; "That's Morty—he's bald now."

Another exposé: One thing you never knew about me. I have a pen name: **Ralph Gleason**. I'm **Ralph Gleason**. And you're taking it good. I always thought you'd get pissed off at me for that. In fact I wrote the column for years and then just drifted into this, decided that I'd like to do a little comedy on the side, and you liked me, and I thought I was doing good, so what the hell, a few write-ups don't hurt anybody. And you're taking it good, that's lovely.

I want you to know another thing, too. That I've never been in jail. I've never been arrested. That's all horseshit. What it is, see, I got a publicity agent that's dynamite. And we have nine phoney cops that work for Pinkerton, and we go from town to town, the same bullshit, you know. I get busted, I write the column the next day, and that's where it's at, man.

The last time I was in town the press was very nice to me. So the opening night the press was here, so, I dunno, I must have said a few things that were a little hostile, you know, and then I got a write-up that was sort of vicious. I'll show you. From a fellow, his name is—wait, I got it here. This is yesterday's paper. It's the *Owl* or something. Oh yeah. *The Owl Steps Out*.

Dig. This guy writes a bread-and-butter column. That means like he's afraid to knock cause they'll lose the

I have listened to *Legendary Lenny Bruce* about a dozen times since the Friday it arrived, and that means that I have spent approximately 36 hours and 59 minutes trying to understand Bruce's work as Carroll's, and vice versa, in order to write this. Most of my colleagues in the critical arena would lament the fact that there is a disorder, a lack of cohesion to what they do, but I would argue that what they in fact share is a clear structure and intentionality to not develop a signature style, which is a very structured and cohesive system, but a system that doesn't reveal itself immediately. It goes against the current market system in the art world in America, as it went against the then current market system in the comedy world in America. It actually fits quite nicely in the world of philosophy, a place that can deal with conceptual systems that place the invisible in the visible.

HIRSCHHORN AND HABERMAS

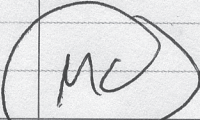
I consider theirs (Carroll's and Bruce's) to be an even a more radical gesture than someone like Thomas Hirschhorn, who uses the *image* of the rhetoric of radicalism. This image has become a signature style for Tom, and thus it is like wallpaper in a sense, wallpaper comprised of books and social theories that frame the work, an artwork whose meaning is derived from an advanced college-level reading list. What was radical about Tom's work is that it made the American audience feel dumb, it made them feel confused, it made them feel apolitical, it made them run, and it was due to the inclusion of a bibliography that would guide the viewer to his point of view as the maker, the artist. A bibliography in the form of book jackets, that left the guts behind, a form of roadkill; a bibliography in the form of a library, a bibliography in the form of book store, a bibliography in the form of a philosopher's cave. The effect was like that of a car crash: they couldn't look away. Tom laid it all out there and said, hey, hey, you motherfuckers, there is more to this thing that is known as art than meets the eye, and maybe it isn't art at all—and maybe, just maybe, you will

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have to think for yourself and perhaps this will detonate other anarchistic acts, or a pseudo- enlightenment within a market system—anything is possible. The Americans loved it, they couldn't get enough of it, and this reminded me of a story that Habermas told me about Nietzsche, and how impossible it was to understand his lectures in German, in Germany. The obfuscation didn't turn people away, because they were all too afraid to admit to the incomprehensibility, and this made them seem all the more meaningful. The lecture halls overflowed with people who still smoked in the classroom. The other thing that Tom's work does is, it makes you side with the artist in order to get anywhere near the work, and this means embracing or rejecting it, and there are very few artists who are doing this, making people experience the work of art from their perspective. To use Larry Weiner's words, viewers literally have to read a work of art, but within a library that masquerades as the atmosphere of a funhouse/clubhouse.

METAPHOR IS DUPLICITOUS

My digression to discuss other artists at work actually has a point, because we only truly exist in relation to the third—a third person, object, place—the basic grammatical structure of language, subject/object. I decided I that what I needed to understand about Carroll and Bruce was the use-value of the shared literalness as a method in their practice. And, what about this? Literalness is a combination of tricksterism, satire and genuineness, or to use satire as an adjective it would be, satiric irony, and this is the point, that I now understand, and what I really understand a bit more about Carroll's work is its relationship to satire and capitalism. Carroll once wrote me a note in a letter when I said that she was a conceptualist, and she mailed me back a postcard that only had the word CAPITALIST written on it. I presumed that she meant that she was not a conceptualist, but a capitalist, and I thought that perhaps that was true of most American artists or of most conceptual artists who

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Buttermelcherstrasse 15
80469 Munich, Germany
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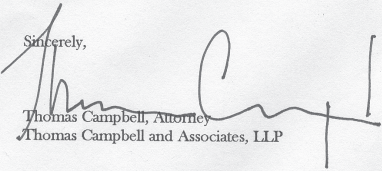
Dear Mr. Hofstetter and Königs:

Please be informed that as of the 20th of June in the year 2001, a patent, trademark, and copyright have been filed for Geppo, in the United States of America on the behalf of Mary Ellen Carroll. Please note the following documents have been filed:

1. Trademark in all situations wherein the word, Geppo, wherein this may appear as a logo as well as any form, either built or as intellectual property that will called or designed as a Geppo. Geppo will be owned solely by Mary Ellen Carroll and whose use and permission are held solely by Mary Ellen Carroll in the United States of America. Any persons or organizations who use or employ this term will violate the above ownership and are punishable by law.
2. A patent has been filed in the United States with the U.S. Patent office for the project Geppo to include all use of the term or structures that will be referred to as Geppo. This patent has been filed with drawings in the U.S. Patent office in Washington, D. C. Any violation or use of this patent without permission of Mary Ellen Carroll is in violation of the U.S. Patent and are punishable by law.
3. A copyright has been made of the word Geppo. This word may not be produced in the United States of America without the permission of Mary Ellen Carroll. Any violation of this copyright is punishable by law.

Please note that the original copies of these documents will be forwarded to you at Galerie Max Kampf.

Sincerely,


Thomas Campbell, Attorney
Thomas Campbell and Associates, LLP

Cc: Walter Holzer, Vienna

are primarily American, but then it was Carroll and I had to ask myself if she was using this as a satiric strategy or not. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense, as the conceptualists or the post-conceptualists are always getting other individuals, institutions, gallerists, artists, writers, etc. to do their work; extending into surplus capital which is where they truly become capitalists, and didn't it make sense that the origins of conceptual art were in America. The understanding of a work of art from the artist's point of view—what a novel idea. (I do not want my use of capitalism to seem trivial, even though it globally has been the dominant economic system since the beginning of the last century, with some delusional exceptions, and the art world is still one of these exceptions where it harbors the affect of being suspicious. In my re-reading of this it actually sounds quaint, and that is not my intention.)

Carroll's work takes time, and the more time you give it, the more it stays with you, and in many ways this is very anti-anti-American which is now very French, and a reason why Bruce was arrested on three occasions—it was just a matter of time. It is like the day following an unexpected, pleasure-filled evening, when you spend the entire next day thinking about why you are still laughing, but not laughing out loud, it is pleased thinking not thinking pleasurably, and when you have pleased thinking about a work of art, it becomes a residue that is like the taste of a '98 Barbera, not a '97, because everyone knows about the '97s. The Italian Giorgio Agamben has written about this paradigmatic philosophical shift, also known as a Copernican turn, from the viewer's perspective to the artist's perspective. On my own I noticed that this is a system from which Carroll's work originates, and Bruce utilized the same system in comedy. (I, too, am a closeted Nietzschean.)

LACAN AND LACAN

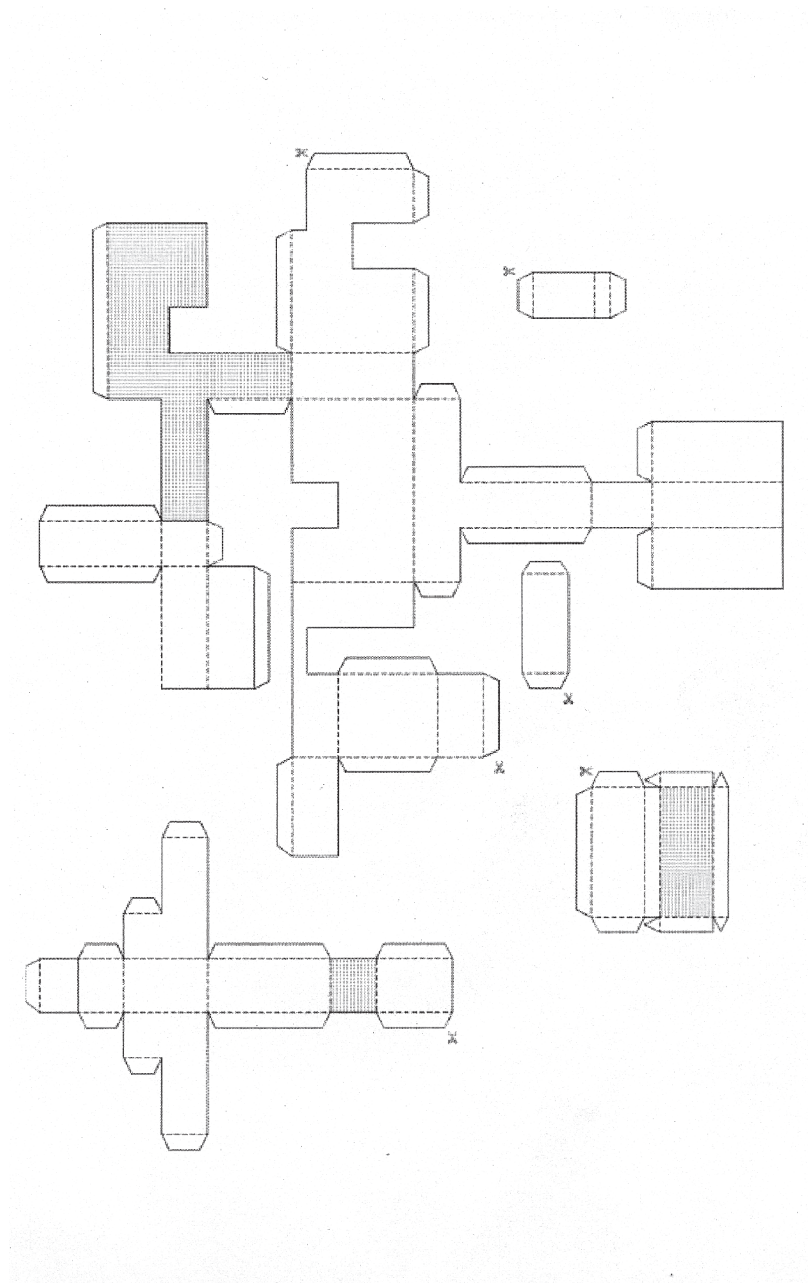
Waiting to turn right at a stoplight in Munich last year, I was staring at a man, who stared back at me, and I kept



thinking of where I recognized him from. It later dawned on me that I didn't know him, but that he resembled one of the men that Carroll had photographed for her series, *100 German Men*. All of the men that I encountered on the street that day looked like they were photographed for *100 German Men*. (Carroll's started work on this project when her film on Berlin turned out to be a disaster or in her mind it turned out to be a disaster, but what happened was that it didn't disappear, or become invisible as most of her work does.) Now, when I write *invisible* you may be thinking or construe this to be in the pejorative, but actually this is what Carroll does, and has done for the past fifteen years, is to make the thingness of an image disappear and the thing itself gets to expose itself, revealing its own essentialism. What we are left holding is our head in our hands. She turns the mirror back on us. This is the only manner in which a work of art can actually function. As all good post-conceptualists, Carroll returned to language, utilizing an inductive process. During the creation of the work *100 German Men* I had an ongoing correspondence with Carroll. It seemed to me that all of the men looked the same, and I was suspicious of Carroll's intent, and the title *100 German Men*. I later deduced that my suspicion implicated me in the process, and I was suspicious of my own perceptions because I too, am a German man. It is a mobius strip, and this is how satire works. As Swift described it, it is like drinking a glass of water, and you are looking through the glass of water and laughing and then suddenly when your head is tilted back and when you are drinking you see your own reflection in the glass and you realize that who or what you are laughing at is yourself.

MANFRED AND MARY ELLEN

As I started to mention, I was on the street in Munich, and I was on my way over to review an exhibition of the artist Manfred Pernice whose work I have written about. I happened to walk by the gallery Max Kampl, and in the



window was an over-sized Xerox copy of a letter to the artist Michael Hofstetter. I have followed Michael's work from the time he was at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in München, in fact quite closely until my interest switched to a classmate of his, Barbara Probst, a German photographer. Probst splits her time between Munich and New York where she moved to live with her American abstract painter boyfriend, now husband, Jonathan Lasker. Carroll and Probst could have been sisters. They share a similar sense of humour. I was surprised to see Michael's name and was curious about the letter, so I kept reading. The letter was from a law firm in New York, and the attorney's name was Thomas Campbell who was writing a letter on behalf of the artist Mary Ellen Carroll and it was addressed to Michael Hofstetter and his architect partner, Ulrich Königs, who is not his partner in the sense that is meant in America.

Hofstetter enlisted a group of artists to create a work that would utilize their model of a Geppo. A Geppo is a plan for a space that looks like architecture, but it has no specific use-value, or scale, and only exists in form; it is a line, a demarcation without specification. Carroll's response to the invitation took the form of a letter, or in actuality the letter was evidence of an action that was taken to obtain a trademark and patent for the Geppo, in America, in Carroll's name. She would license or retain the rights in her country, America, and also proceeded to secure the rights in the rest of the world, excluding Germany.

HOFSTETTER AND CAMPBELL

When I asked Carroll about this, she said that she made the decision to create a work that would treat the Geppo as piece of intellectual property. This was the only way to respond to the problem, not to sit and cut and paste a paper model together in a hotel room in Cologne for someone else who came up with an idea—that would take all of the pleasure out of it. Carroll said that after



Michael received the faxed letter from the attorney as the work of art, he sent her an email, and wrote that he thought that she was being mean, and so American. Carroll wrote back to Michael and said that this was the only solution, the rest was just a waste of time, and there would be other artists who would labour in their name. Mutual friends in Munich later said that Michael was envious and said that this would have been the work that he would have liked to create.

It was pure tricksterism, *ad infinitum*. I asked Carroll about the attorney, the process of getting the trademark, the patent, the fees and she said that she didn't do any of it, it was a hoax. Campbell is the nom de plume for her business affairs person, and that she initially contacted intellectual property attorneys after she wrote the letter to see about getting the trademark, but that most of them were so conventional, in terms of their thinking about intellectual property and they didn't get what she was trying to do, and what she was trying to do was also extremely expensive and that everyone thinks, and it is true, that America is an aggressively litigious place, so why not create a work that would resemble the course of action that would legitimately be taken within a capitalist system. Does it make it any less valid that it was a hoax when it is a conceptual work of art? Attorneys have an understanding of the law, but what they really have is a particular command of language, and that is what was threatening— the LANGUAGE.

The action or the interaction, the thing that takes the form to concept is what is being isolated as the work of art, and Manfred and Mary Ellen could switch places, although they would need to switch materials, as Carroll too is a sculptor, but a sculptor of the social. When Carroll is utilizing the commercial system the work has to take some form for the market, and this form resembles photography, film, video, performance, etc., but ultimately resides in language. Manfred makes us aware



of ourselves or self-conscious through the observation and distillation of a work of art in relation to the actions that are taken to realize that work of art. Carroll makes us aware by the interaction between human beings and space, that space being in relation to another human being, or what would be construed as architecture, or even time: the place between two things where they exist as themselves. In writing this I have repeatedly asked myself why Carroll just doesn't write, what is the point of creating anything concrete at all if it is just a conceptual exercise, but then Carroll is writing.

FRASER AND BRUCE

With the human form, and recent thoughts on the relationship of sensuality to conceptualism, another American female artist, Andrea Fraser, comes to mind. Fraser is dealing with different issues, but in a similar manner to Carroll and by infusing the work with that which we haven't seen, a criticality of the system simultaneously with a criticality of self-consciousness, and I mean this in the philosophical sense, not the psychological. (These works resemble narcissistic acts, but this would be an ad hominem argument.) Perhaps the post-conceptualists who happen to be female or feminine males, understand that sensuality and humour and conceptualism create a hybrid that can expand the meaning of a work of art, which makes the object or subject stare back at us. (Please refer to my essay on Manfred Pernice's work, *Handlung als ästhetische Chance*, where I explain what I mean by the correct sense of humour. This would be in the English sense, not the German or even the American.)

I opened my mail box today and there was another package from New York that contained a book. The book was *Iron John*, a book celebrating masculinity by the poet Robert Bly. I didn't know if this was some part of Carroll's process concerning my edification on her work, American culture, or my masculinity. I opened this



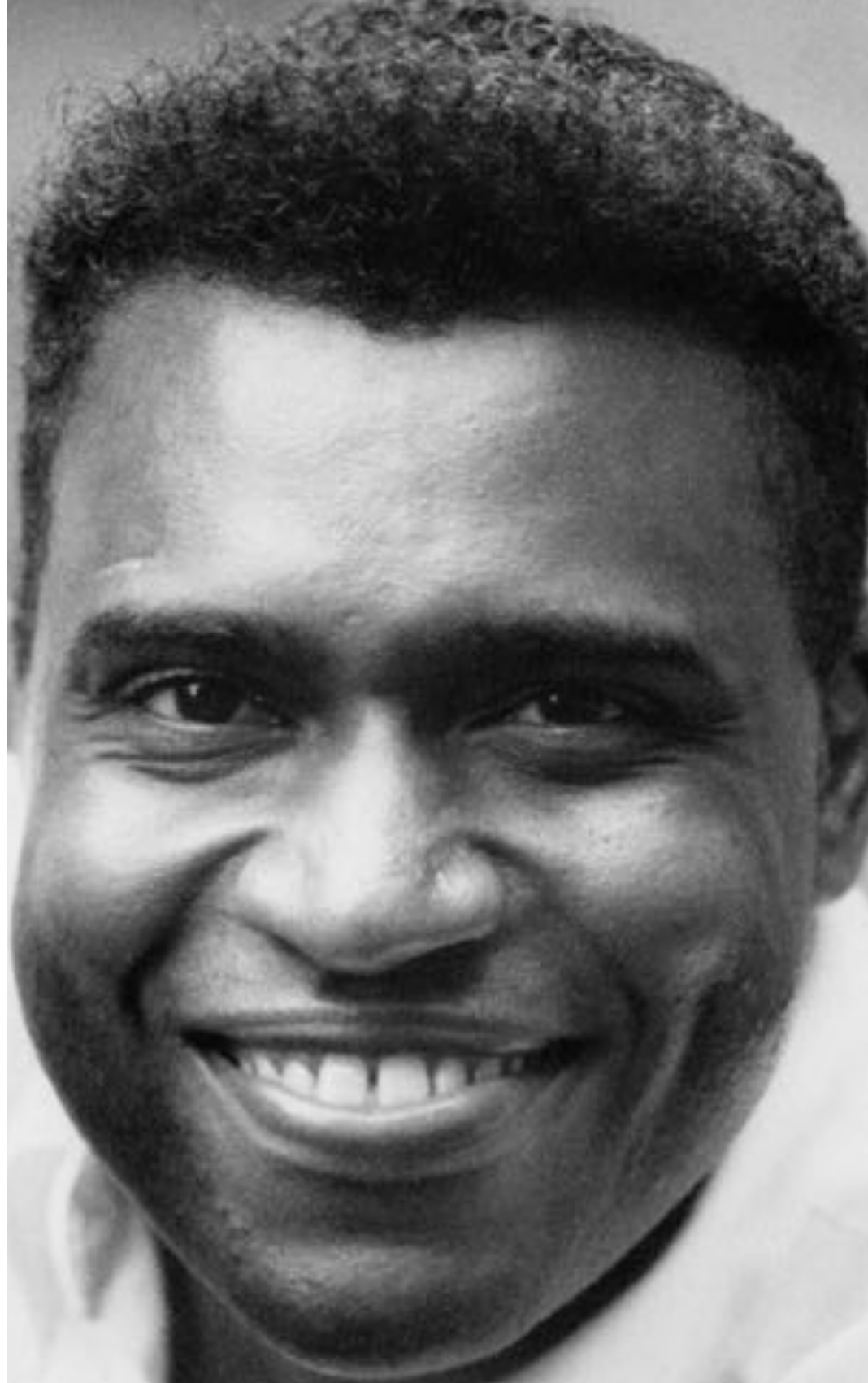
book and pasted in the interior was what looked like an ad, but where it was placed, and if it was placed, I didn't know. It read like a casting call and was signed love, Mary Ellen Carroll.

It now makes sense why Carroll asked me to write this essay—a provocateur is also an astute observer.

CARROLL AND HERBSTREUTH

The current phenomenon in American is 'masculinity' and is evidenced by their war, and within their cultural arena by a plethora of exhibitions and essays that have their generative impulses in the comfort and the divisiveness of specificity. The specific reinforces prejudice and slowly moves back to the general, but not so general that it reflects back to the individual as Carroll makes us do. The divisive sub-categories of culture, gender, nationalism, social and economic status, political and religious affiliations make us laugh in that English manner—that being the same manner with which we laugh at the title of this work, *All of the men who think they can be me*. Implied in the title is the question that makes us reflect back on ourselves—therein also lies the answer, the two words, *think* and *me*. As I am writing this I am thinking about Carroll writing this as me.

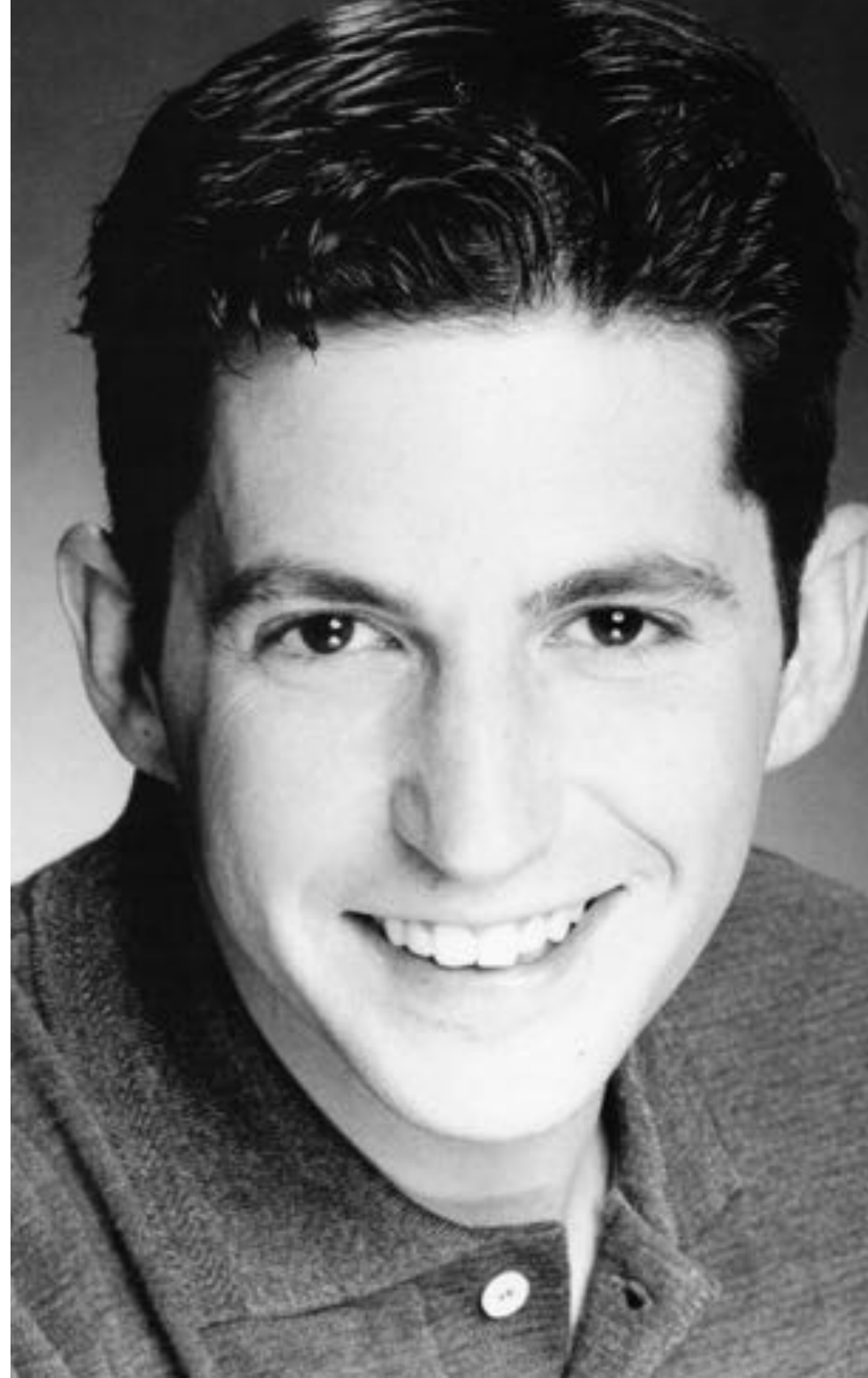
Peter Herbstreuth, Berlin 2003





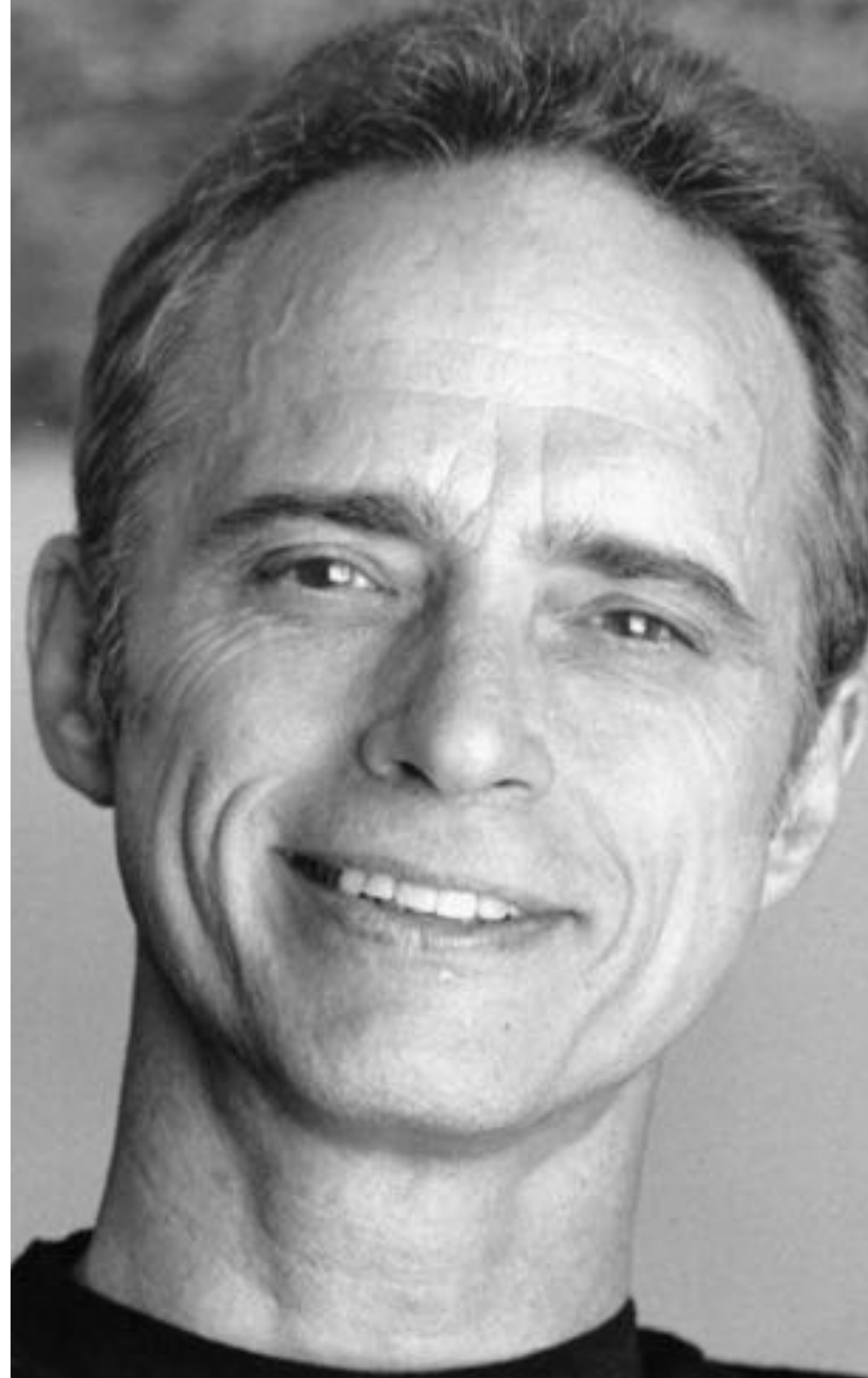




































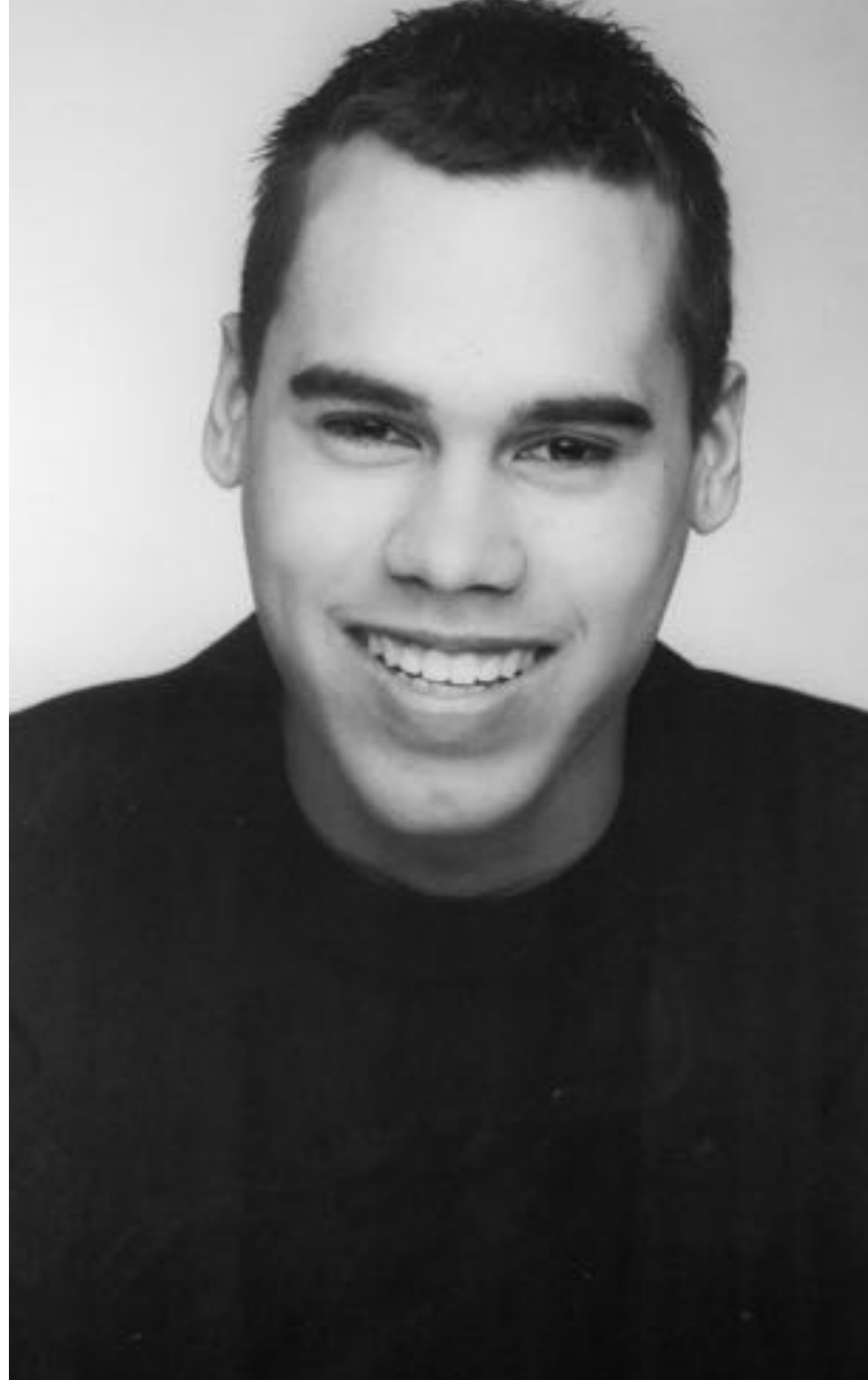




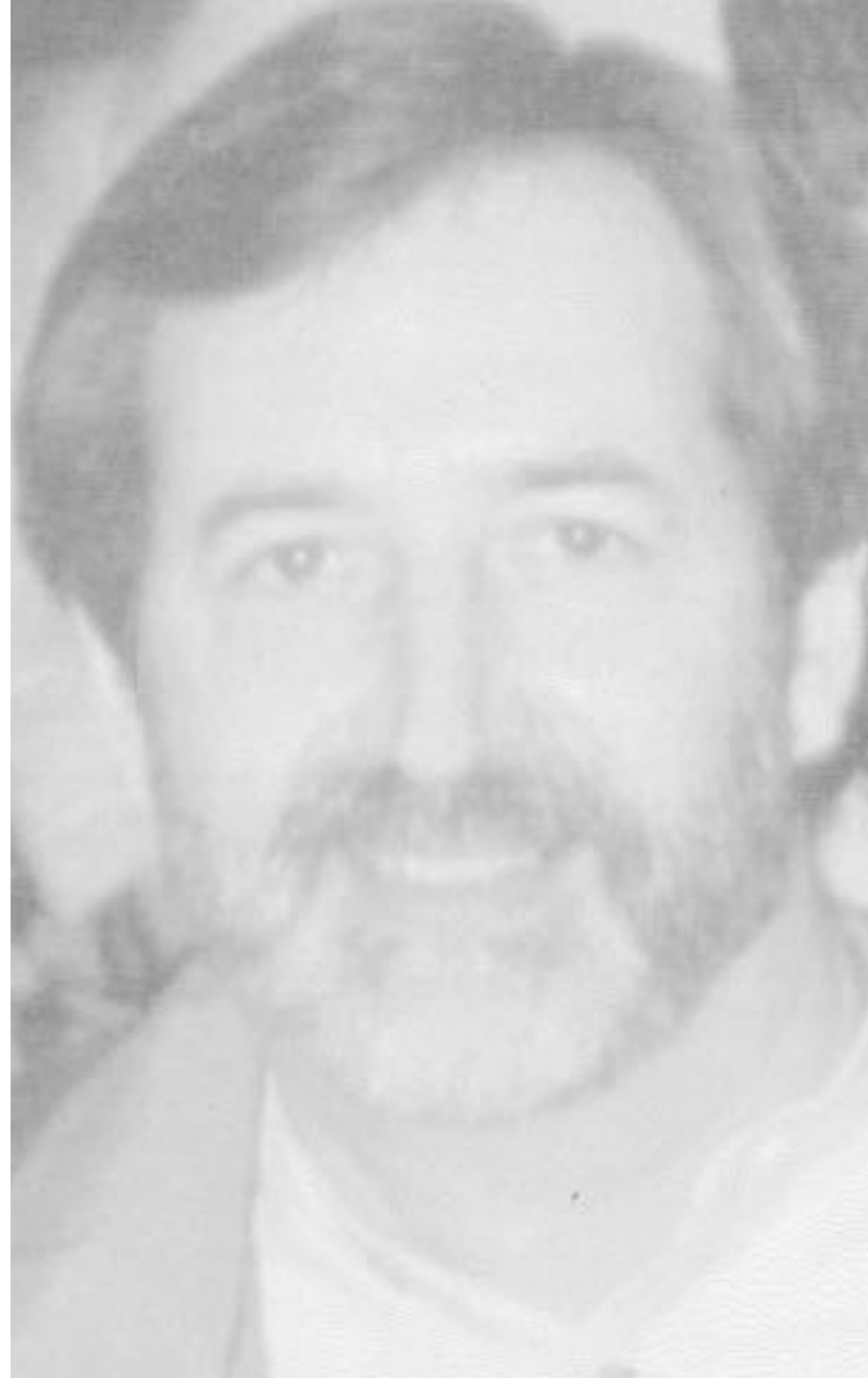




























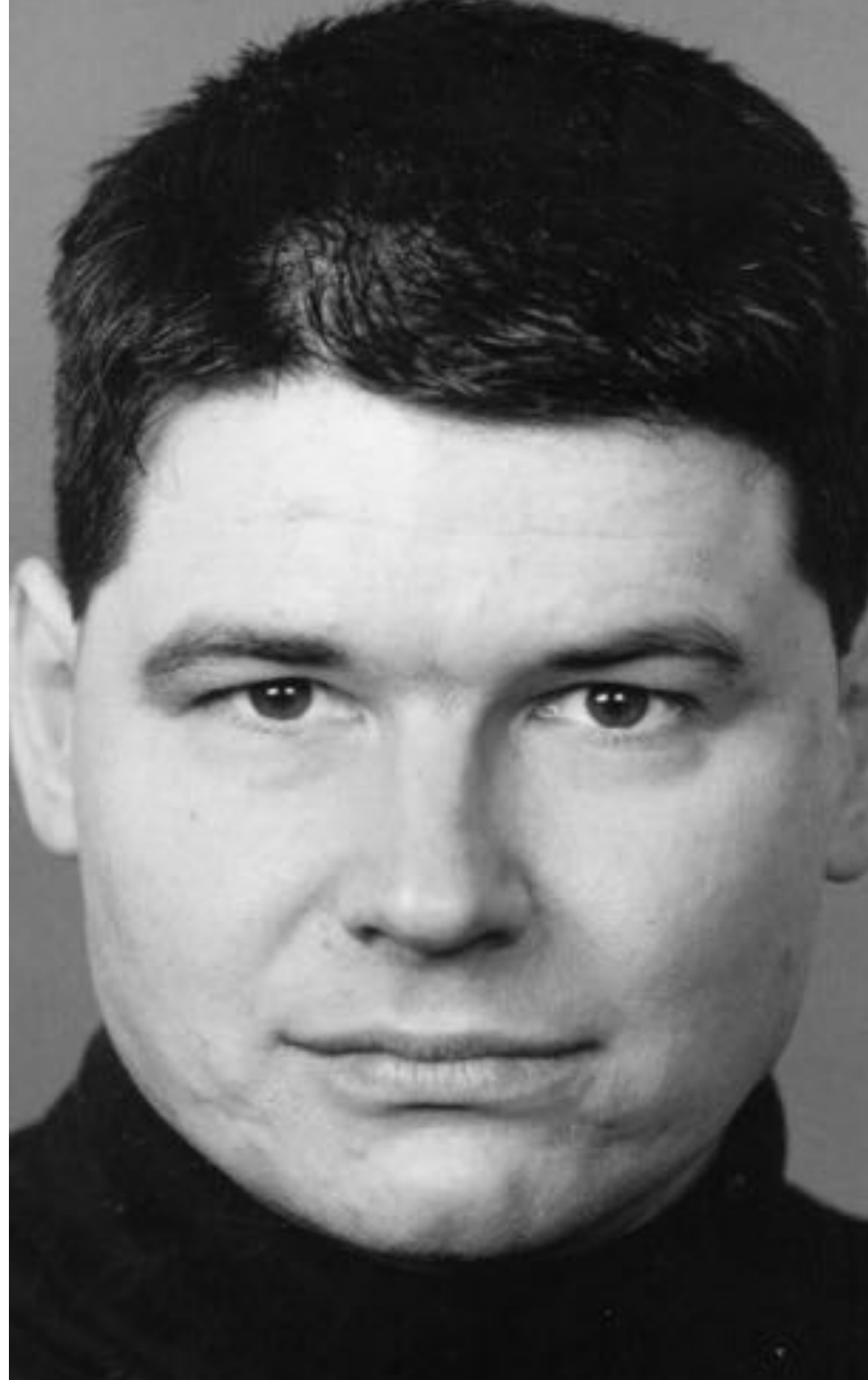






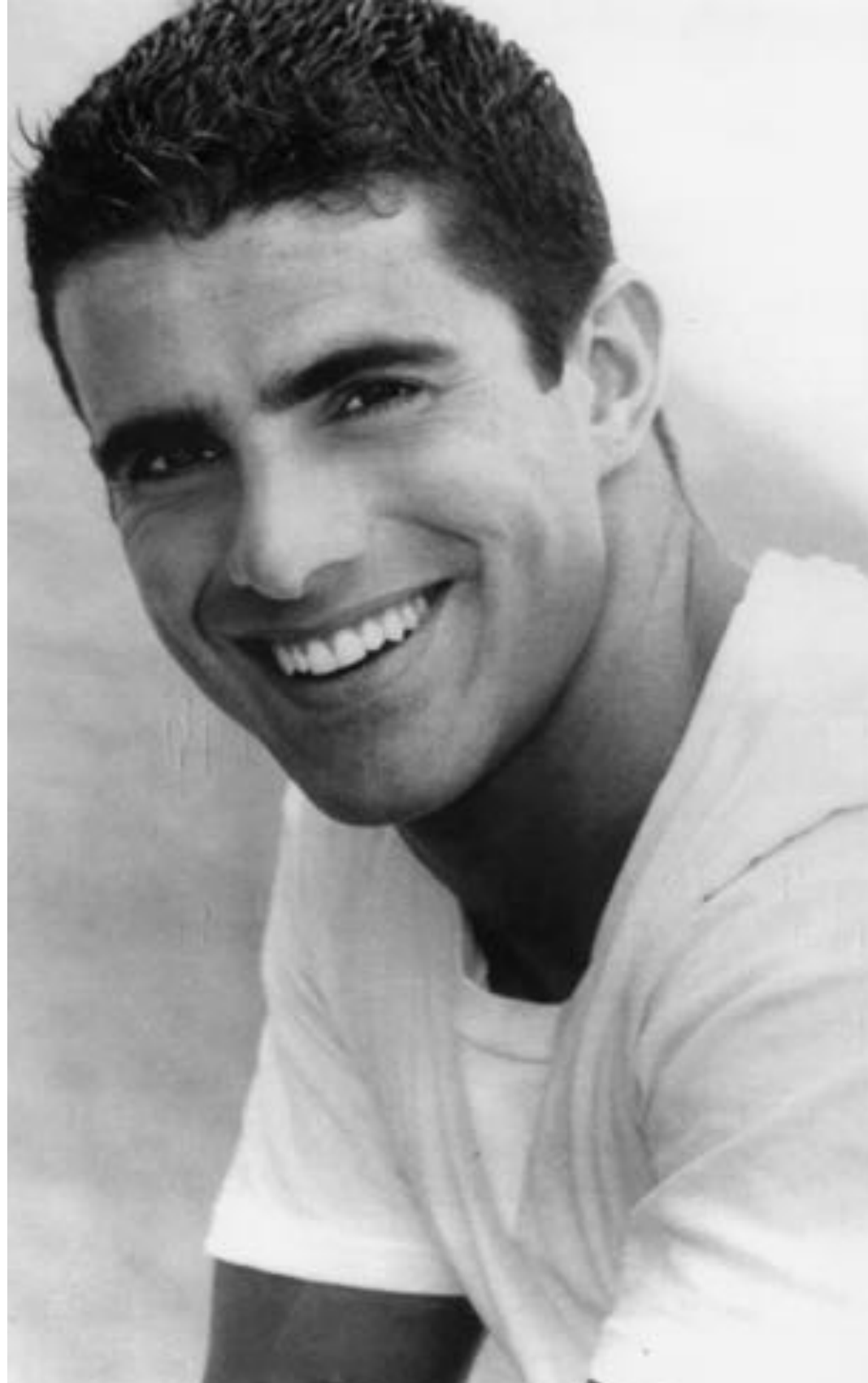
























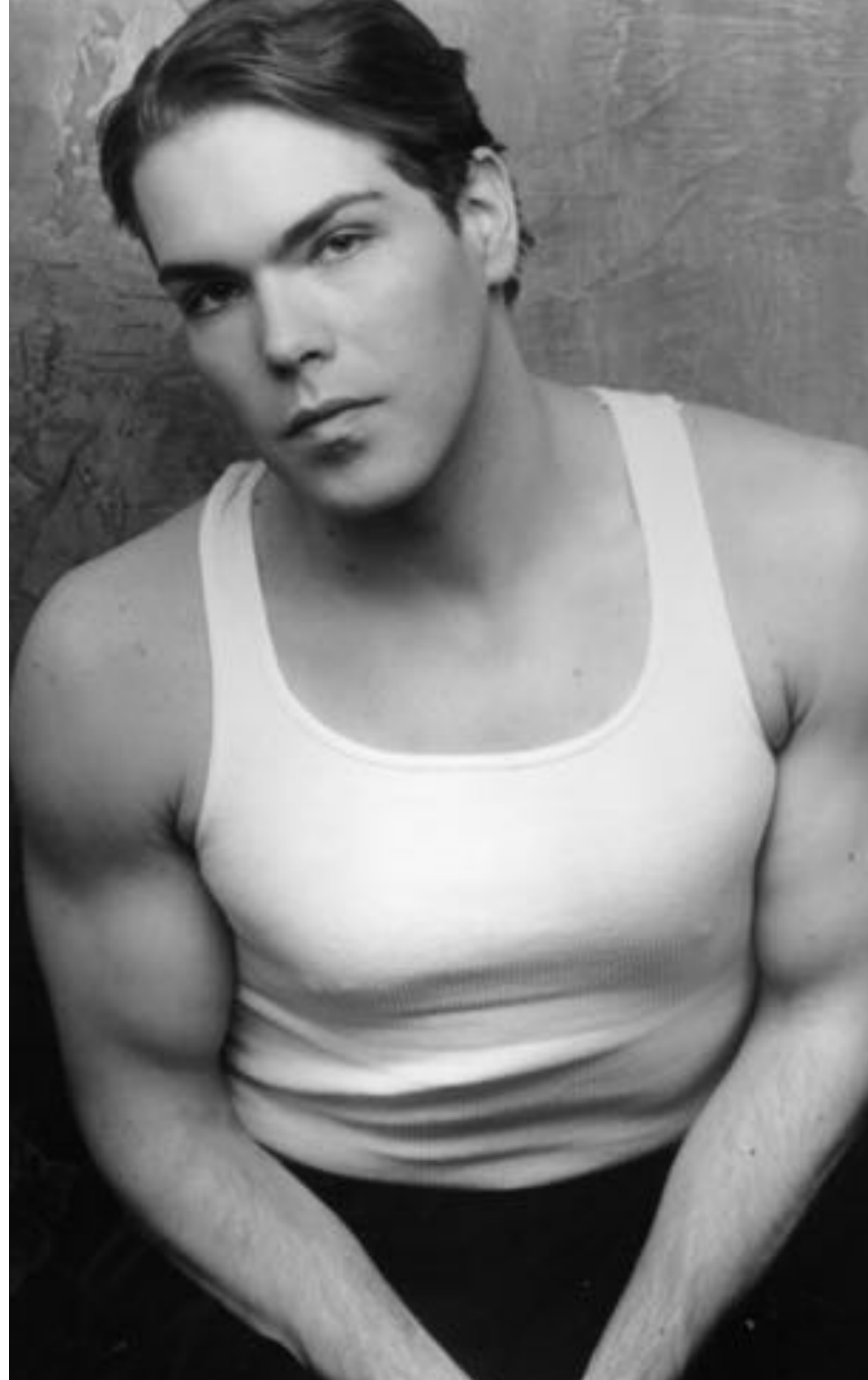






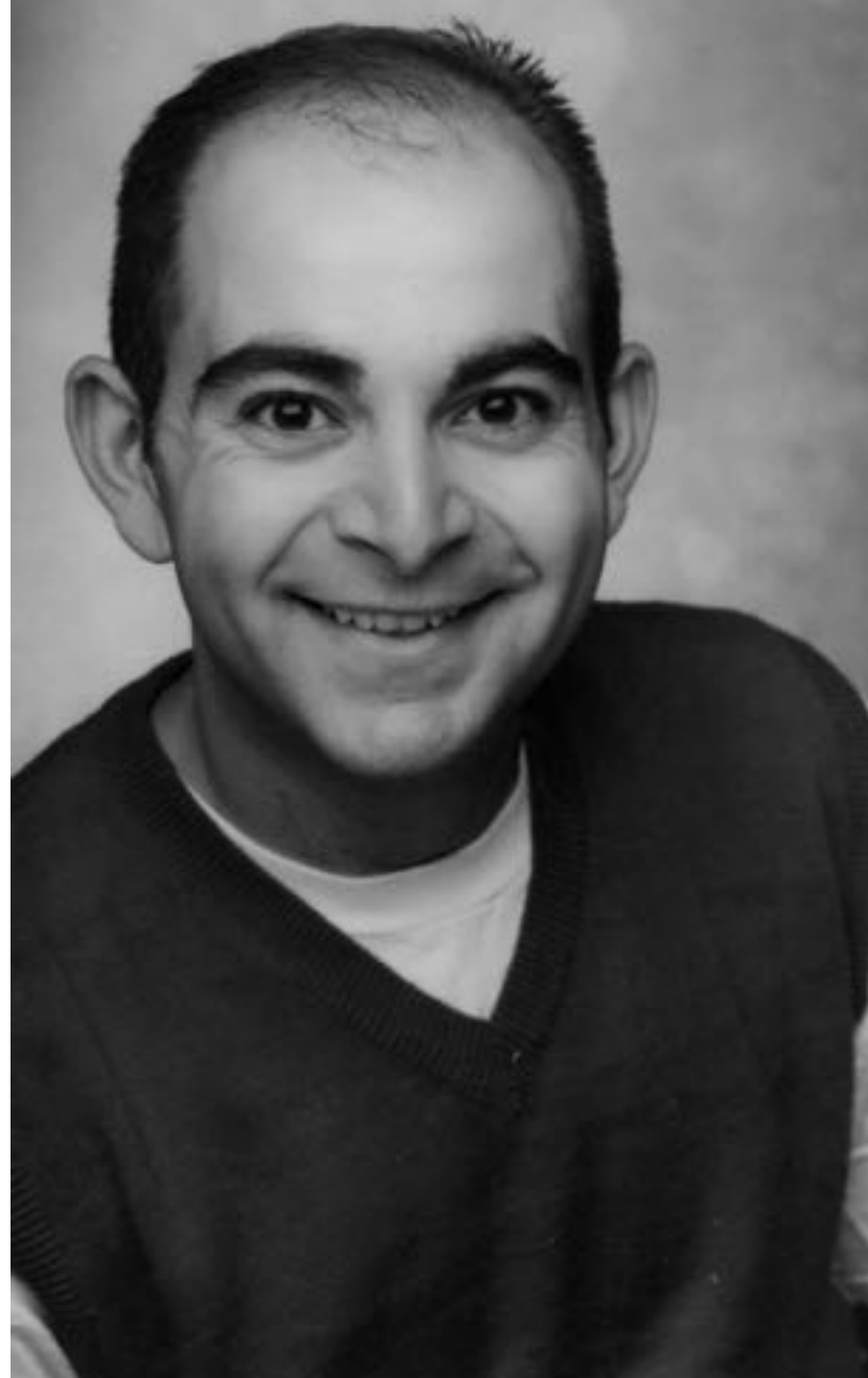




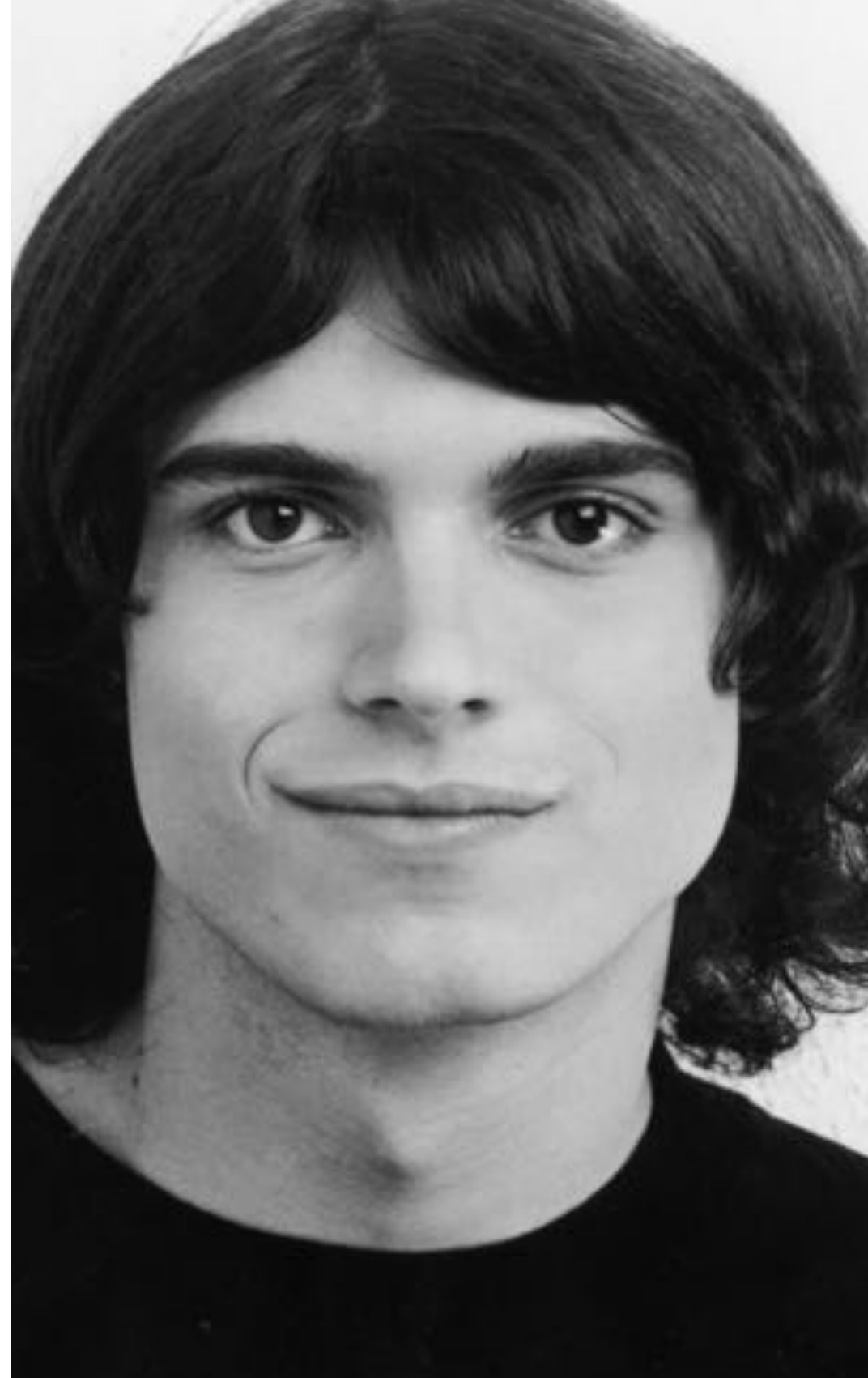
















What would it be like if one day everyone you encountered said that they were you. Would you let them assume your identification, knowing that ultimately they can only be themselves. These questions are what Carroll provokes us with in All the men that think they can be me.

Mary Ellen Carroll lives between New York and Sicily.

Mary Ellen Carroll

All the Men Who
**Think
They Can
Be Me**

First edition limited to 250 numbered copies.
20 copies deluxe limited edition of this book,
accompanied by a signed and numbered multiple by the artist is
available from onestar press.

Layout and photos: Mary Ellen Carroll

Printed and bound in France

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