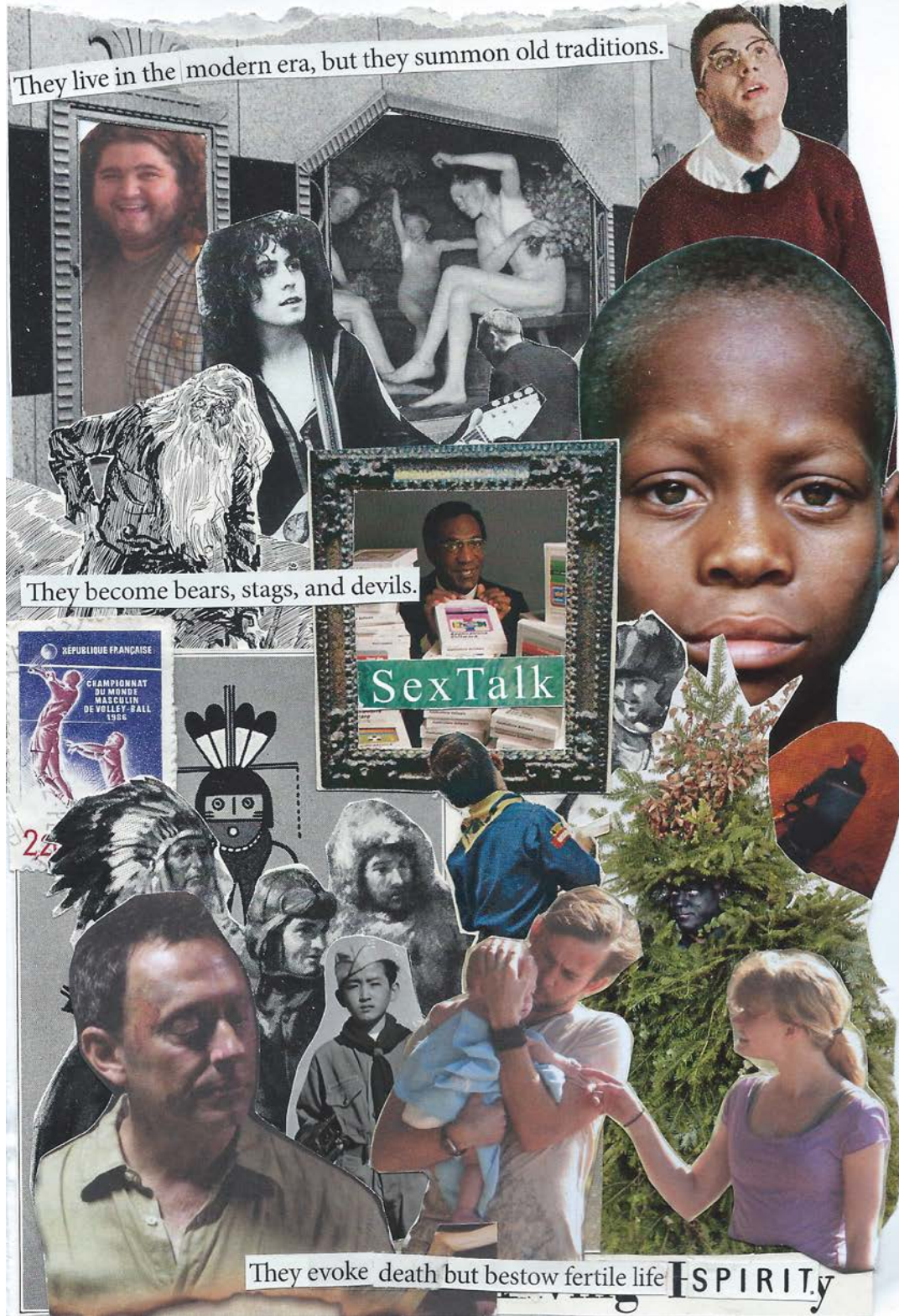


They live in the modern era, but they summon old traditions.

They become bears, stags, and devils.

They evoke death but bestow fertile life

ESPIRIT.y



While completing this work, my father died. I was going to ask him what the word "masculinity" meant to him. He was a Christian, but he had been a member of several churches before he died. In most sects of Christianity, the male has several roles, all of which are associated with an active, authoritative, and influential masculinity. It is a supreme irony that Jesus of Nazareth, upon whose shoulders the founders of Christianity built a church, was a passive, nonauthoritarian, and, while he taught in the Roman province of Judea, ^{an} influential ^{male} only among a small group of radical Jews ^{and outcasts}. My father, while I was growing up at home, was a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints ('LDS' or 'Mormon'). As a male, he was a "priesthood holder," the ^{or} possession ^{of} restored powers ^{believed to be} only bestowed ^{once} before the church's founder Joseph Smith: by Jesus Christ ^{himself} to his disciples. As a faith so centered in the authority of the masculine, any form of undermining perpetrated in the ^{act} ~~form~~ of disobedience was not



WELL-TEMPERED

The stuff that men are made of



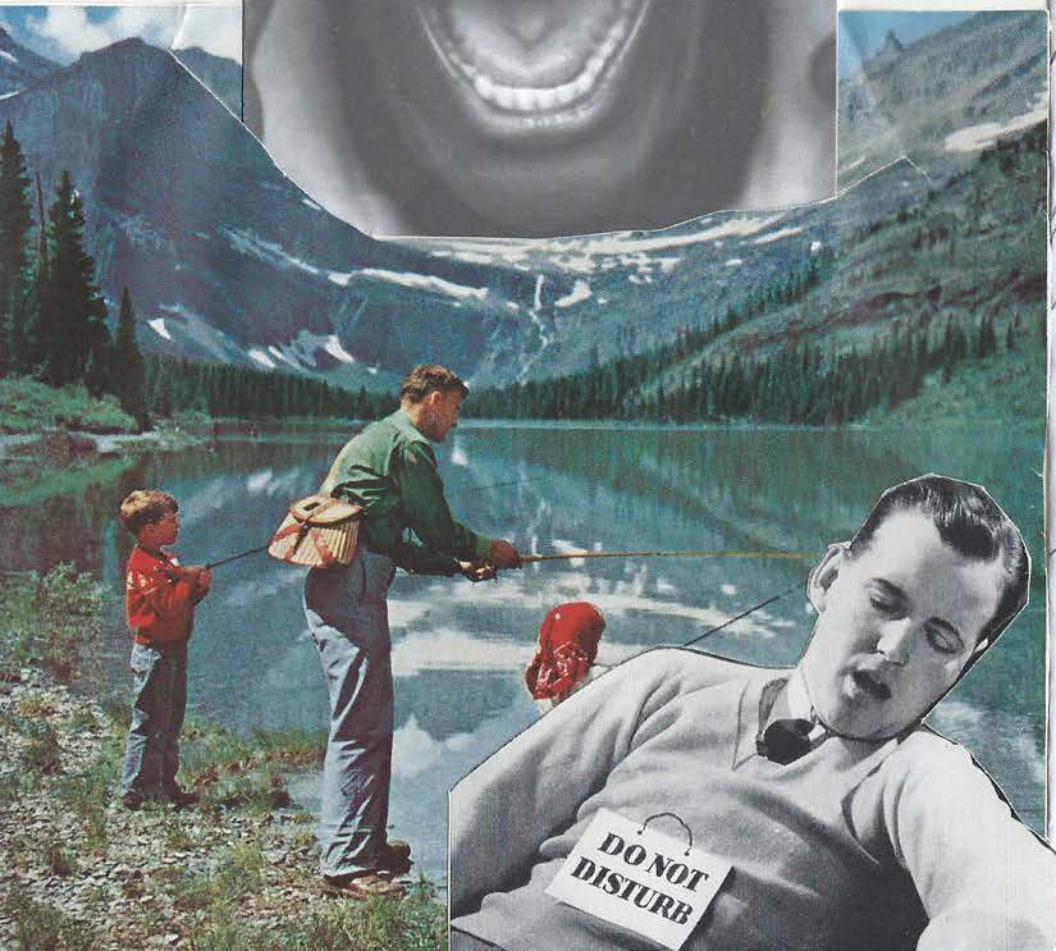
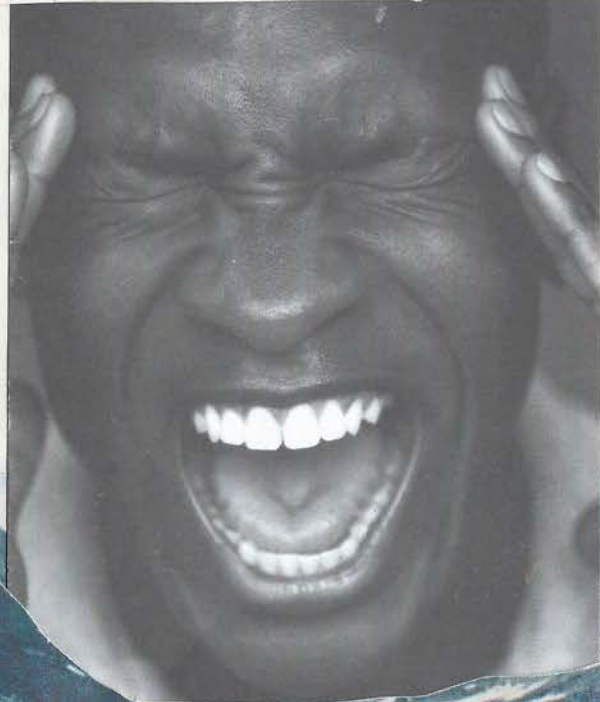
tolerated. This reaction to a belief my father held as a man, a head of the household, a bread winner, etc., came swiftly down on my brother and I in the manner^{of} physical and verbal abuse. Like the heretical Gnostics of early Christianity, but without the initiation into a school of learning, we refused to recognize an authority outside ourselves. This was an exasperating situation for^{the} many years we lived with our father. It was likely exacerbated by the living fact that he came into our lives when I was 5 and my brother was 3, legally adopting us after marrying our^{recently} divorced mother. We did not have a collective memory of our biological father, but we must have intuitively known this^{man} was not him. Furthermore, the only authority we truly respected was the gift-giving and nourishing abode of our grandparents. The feud between my father and his in-laws ~~was~~ ^{was} legendary, at least on the scale of our small and passive-aggressive family. It was my father's conviction that ^{they} (not just through us) actively undermined his parental,

and therefore priesthood, authority. My grandparents were also faulted (in-part) for his own loss of faith in the LDS church, as was what he considered to be falsehoods in the theological underpinnings of Mormonism.

Before he died, my father still expressed faith in Jesus Christ - the only Son of God, the redeemer of souls, the Messiah who would return again.

It has been noted in much scholarship that the personal relationship with Christ professed by so many is one of tender love, a Western idea often held to be maternal or feminine. Depictions of Jesus Christ are in a way feminine - long hair, compassionate eyes, graceful gestures. Indeed, the sacred aspects of many divine figures, especially male figures, are associating in one image the pinnacle of spiritual union as the reconciliation of the masculine & feminine, the resolution of duality. Androgyny then, or the intersexed, or the non-binary, being in one body the transcendence of sex and/or gender, the secular definition of a spiritual aim.

The American Boy



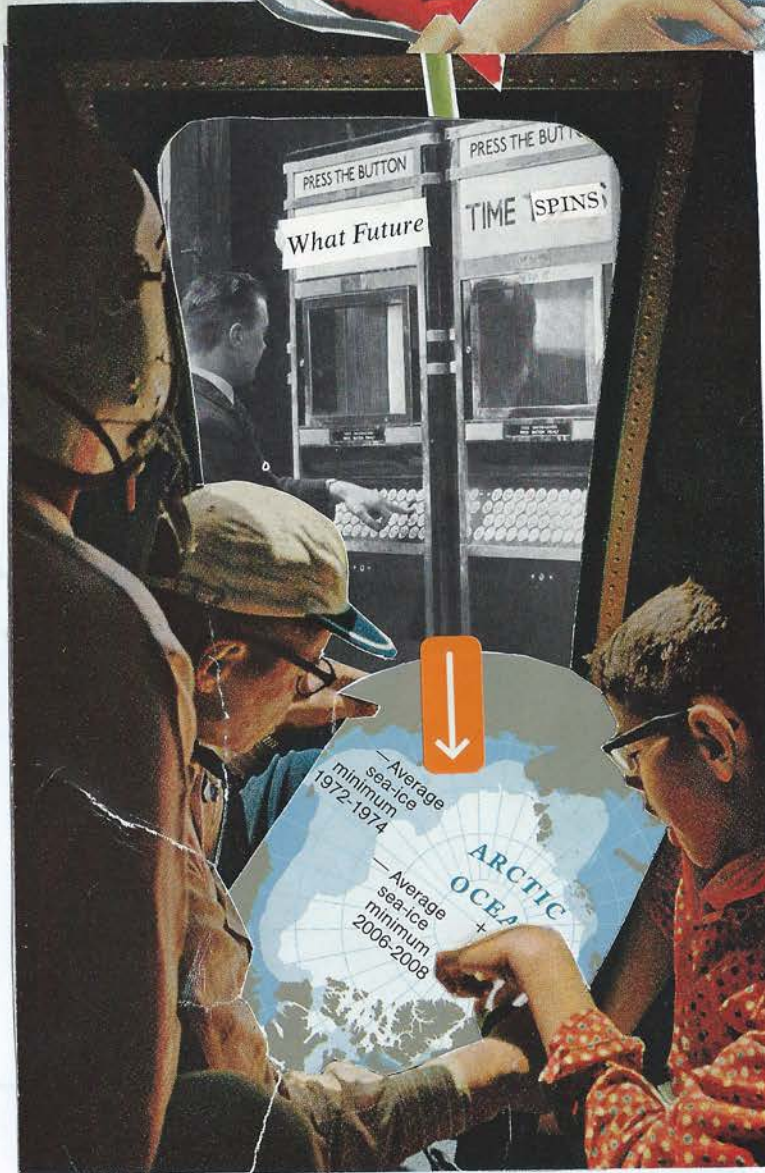
my first
Being raised a Mormon through ^v18 years, roughly
~~for~~ half my life at this point, has given me and
taken from me. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-
Day Saints is a thoroughly American religion, one
founded in the early 19th century, not in the ancient
world, but the modern era. Fundamentally I have
had to ^{be} active in my own search which I set out
~~on~~ at 18, ^{on} a path apart from my upbringing. Just as
my father left the Southern Baptist faith of his
youth, I have had to reckon with what deep and
shapely stamp the ^{LDS} faith ^{has} had on my life as a man.
All of this writing so far has been to disclose my
background in a gesture of trust. Almost 18 years
has passed since I ~~went~~ ^{went} out into the world, carry-
ing the paradoxes of Mormon culture. Embedded
thereafter for a decade in a seat of liberal and
progressive thought - Portland, Oregon - expansion
in width and depth of self and being was en-
couraged by the places, people, and experiences I
was present to, a growth that has carried across
the country to New York. Halfway through my life
as a man, I act as midwife to this preface.

The Wikipedia page does us some good, but not much. "A set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with boys and men." In *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson, they state

THE MEANING OF MASCULINITY IS NEITHER TRANSHISTORICAL NOR CULTURALLY UNIVERSAL; IT IS NOT CARRIED ON THE Y CHROMOSOME, NOR IS IT SOMEHOW A FUNCTION OF TESTOSTERONE. RATHER, THE MEANINGS OF MANHOOD VARY FROM CULTURE TO CULTURE AND WITHIN ANY ONE CULTURE OVER TIME. (Introduction, p. xxiii)

Within our culture, Western American culture, there is much variety, but also much that is stagnant in what is considered to be "typical of, appropriate for, and expected," of those we identify (or who identify) as a boy or man. As stated earlier however in the example of depictions of (and the teachings ~~even~~ of) Jesus of Nazareth, to some extent no matter the gender identification, we all express masculine and feminine, or have the potentiality to do so, because we have all been developing human beings existing in a

nexus of environmental pressures interacting with our individual genetics. Gender is a social construction, but it isn't immaterial; what is its substance? The historian John Tosh posits what the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1980s & '90s stated in terms of Jungian psychology: manhood or masculinity is some kind of socio-cultural state which is achieved through trial (Tosh specifies this by using the term 'manliness'). In the seminal text, by poet Robert Bly [of the movement] entitled *Iron John*, after a Brothers Grimm fairy tale, initiatory rites are interpreted as necessary for the transition from boy to man. This is contrasted with girls' own transition into womanhood, which is rooted in menarche. This is however not the reason given as to why separate, gender-specific trials are required. In Leonard Shlain's *The Alphabet and the Goddess*, it is writing and its invention that shakes society to the core, allowing for men who usually hunt and gather to centralize their work in accounting for blossoming agriculture,



shifting women out of their dominant role as matriarchs of home and hearth. The men's movement focuses chiefly on how because of industrialization, men's work has been brought further away from the home again, perhaps explaining in part the ~~emergence~~^{emergence} of the women's liberation movement, as well as the anxieties and poor health which plague the average male. Because of two separate hemispheres of the brain, Shlain, who was a neurologist, bases his reading of the sudden transition from Ice Age matriarchies to the emergence of patriarchy on a shift in which side of the brain was favored in activity - from right to left. All of this research and reading of sources which have accumulated in academia over the last four decades, and onto my bookshelves the last decade, seems to be too generalized or too reductionist. The assumption of historians today is that history has been written from a male perspective and so masculinity as a form of specific study is redundant, unlike women's studies. The men's movement sought a reflective, restorative approach to masculinity

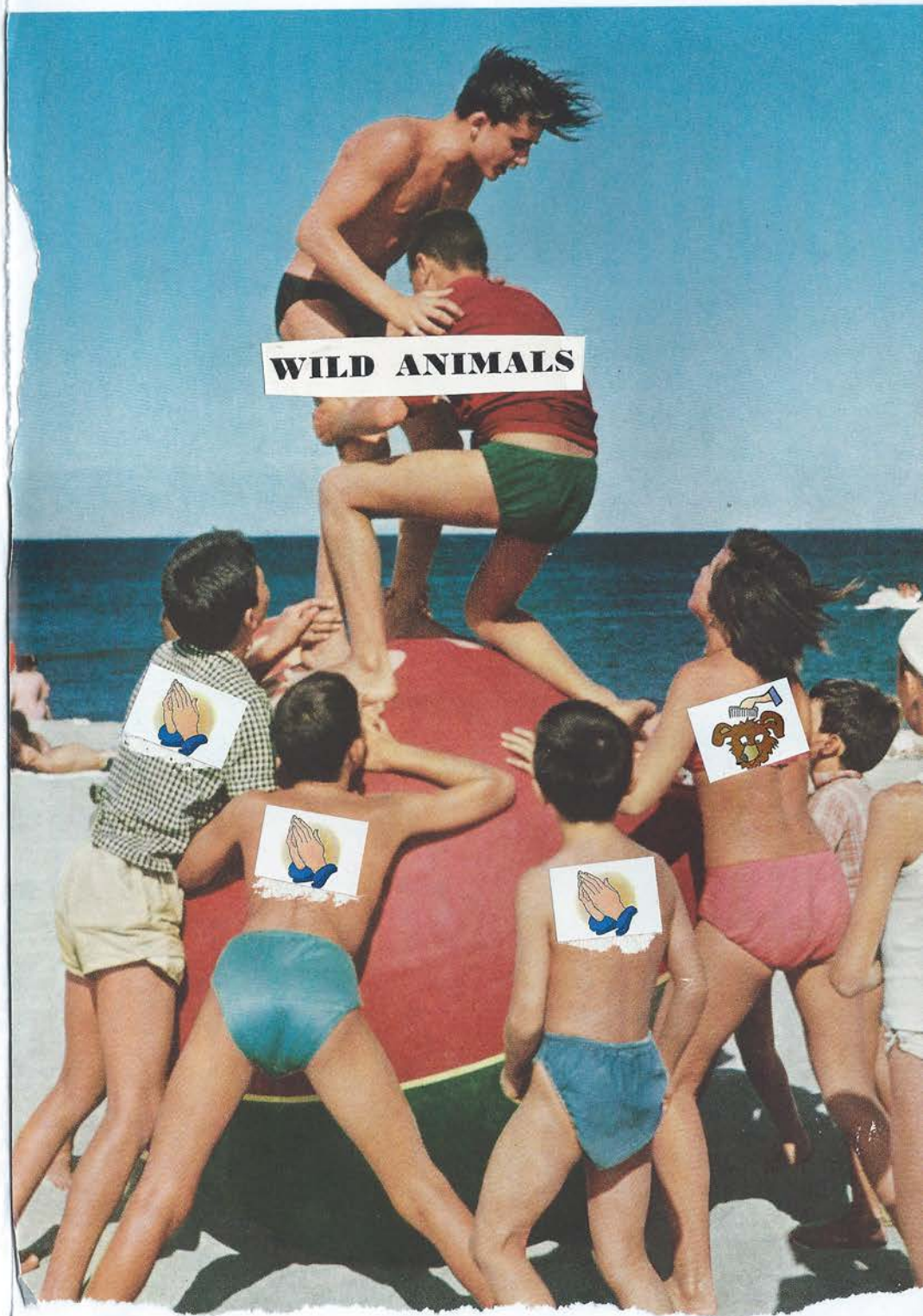
what a security it is to all
To have me here among you and at call

on the grounds that capitalism and the mechanization of industry had diluted the unique, male energy of manhood...but what is that exactly?

Although continuing to approach this preface in the spirit of scholarship appeals to me, I feel I must leave all this thumbing through and clicking around behind. I need to embrace this wound of losing my father, tear open my experiences, rend and then render their material in light of my readings and my collage work - creating something new out of their joining.

*

I remember hatching a plan similar to one I saw in a movie one summer. I had no idea this was a scheme rooted in Shakespeare but the plan was to over time collect the undergarments and accessories to make myself over into a young woman in order to become the friend and confidante of a girl I had a crush on in a neighboring apartment complex. Ladybug it, assume a girl's name, take some of my mother's makeup, commit to the role. The plan never realized out of cowardice or the sheer improbability of such a thing - maybe



the summer just ended. I took the items back to my parent's room in secret, the hiding place no longer needed, and went back to playing the role since I - I - I don't know when.

*

WRITING VEILS THE APPEARANCE OF LANGUAGE;
IT IS NOT A GUISE FOR LANGUAGE BUT A DISGUISE.

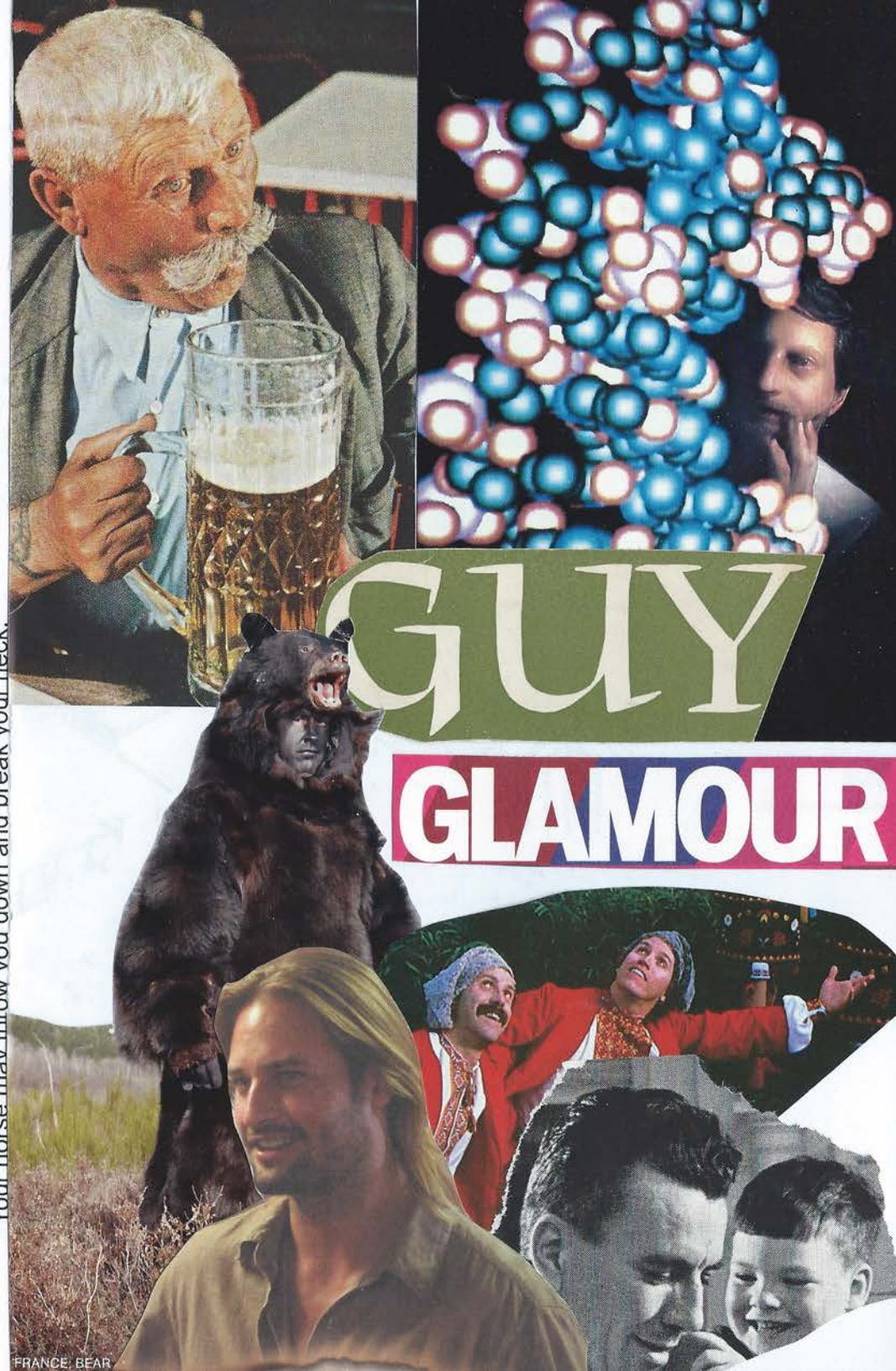
- Ferdinand de Saussure

*

I usually wear a beard. That's what is said, regardless of whether or not it is parted on with spirit gum. I could not grow a full beard myself until I was 25, about when brain development is finished. Without a beard, I am told I look younger, no, older, no, not at all different - it depends on who sees me. My partner sees me most and she likes it. My sister used to cry at bearded men, perhaps because she couldn't "see" their faces. The masks we wear for the virus around babies and toddlers must be disturbing. Does one wear a beard to hide one's identity, as that Man of a Thousand Faces^o did with his case of disguises?

*

^o LON CHANEY



Your horse may throw you down and break your neck.

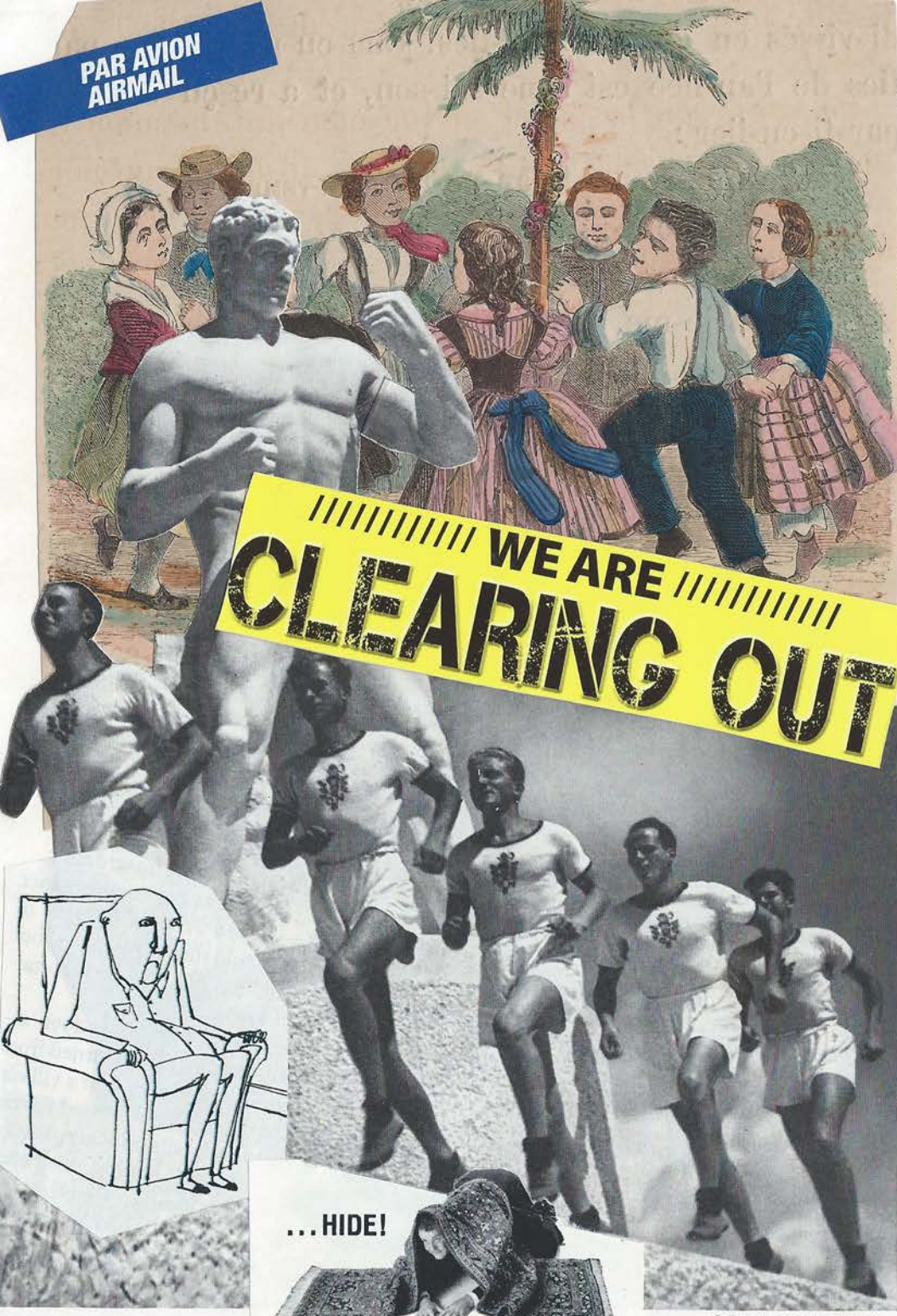
Actor Jonathan Brandis, star of such films as Ladybugs, Sidekicks, 1990's It, and the science-fiction TV show SeaQuest, committed suicide at the age of 27 in November 2003, two months after I had moved to Portland, Oregon for college. He was drinking heavily in the weeks before and told friends that he was planning on killing himself. He was a resident of Los Angeles, California. My first apartment was owned, operated, and lived in on the top floor of the Belle House by an aging Hollywood matriarch with double-knee replacements. After my first long-term relationship ended two years later, I sank into a deep depression. An insomniac, I left the apartment after midnight to walk to late-night cafés, watching elderly men play chess endlessly. The infinite game is played "for the purpose of continuing the play" (James P. Carse). Life is a play we continue to game, until we lose it; but who will choose to live in their manhood with the wound which does not kill?

*

AT THIRTY, A MAN SHOULD KNOW HIMSELF LIKE THE PALM OF HIS HAND, KNOW THE EXACT NUMBER OF HIS DEFECTS AND QUALITIES, KNOW HOW FAR HE CAN GO, FORETELL HIS FAILURES - BE WHAT HE IS. AND ABOVE ^{ALL} ACCEPT THESE THINGS. - Albert Camus

I wasn't a theatre kid but I did perform on-stage in high school. The play was performed by my Japanese language class^(in Japanese) in ~~my~~^{our} second year. It was a folktale called Kobutorijisan (こぶとりのいさむ) or "The Old Man With The Wen", a 'wen' being a cyst, the kind which men can develop from an over-production of testosterone. I played the lead, one of a actually two old woodcutters who both have cysts. I mimed the cyst on the right side of my face, which is taken from me after wandering into ^{the} woods of a local mountain and getting caught in the rain. The old man sees 'oni' (おに) which are ogres or trolls, deriving from a root character meaning "to hide or conceal", which ^{indicates} that oni, like ghosts, do not wish to be seen. They light a bonfire and dance, sing, and drink sake. The old man overcomes his fear of the oni, dancing with them - and they are greatly entertained (the track we played for the stage was 'Paul Revere' by The Beastie Boys - I did my best robot). They wish to return the next night, and so they take his wen from him as collateral. The other old man, with a cyst on his left side, is a neighbor who hears the story and goes to the same hollow tree in the woods

PAR AVION
AIRMAIL



WE ARE
CLEARING OUT

...HIDE!

© Daniel by Eisenstaedt

BRONZED ATHLETES, LIKE STATUES COME TO LIFE, JOG PAST A MIGHTY MARBLE BOXER IN THE MUSSOLINI STADIUM

ections to the Whitman Essay

to wait for the oni. The difference when ^{he} jumps out to dance is three-fold: this old man expects to have his cyst taken; he leaps out without overcoming his fears; and he does not dance with skill. He is given his neighbor's wen, and ^{so} goes home with two, unable to hide one side of his face anymore, even more full of anger and envy, left with selfishness and cowardice

*

IT WAS FINE IT WAS FAST / WE WERE FIRST WE WERE LAST / IN LINE AT THE TEMPLE OF PLEASURE / BUT THE GREEN WAS SO GREEN / AND THE BLUE WAS SO BLUE / I WAS SO I / AND YOU WERE SO YOU / THE CRISIS WAS LIGHT AS A FEATHER / THANKS FOR THE DANCE / IT WAS HELL, IT WAS SWELL, IT WAS FUN / THANKS FOR ALL THE DANCES / ONE TWO THREE ONE TWO THREE ONE - from "Thanks for the Dance" by Leonard Cohen

*

At 20, I left America on my own for the first time, to the land of our mother tongue - Britain. Months before I had volunteered at a bike shop by day to help pay for the classes on maintenance and repair they held in the evening. When my passport was received, tickets were bought, and my bike boxed up, I flew to Heathrow, took a bus to Reading,

TO SCALE

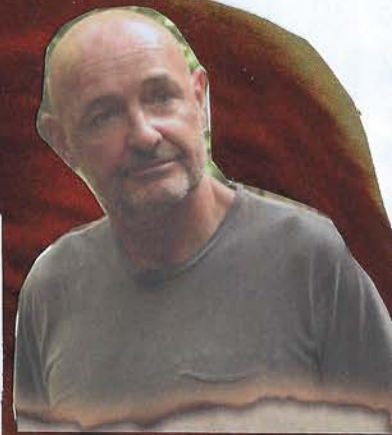
and assembled my bike on the train platform before taking it down the line to my first hostel in Bath. The plan was: a month through England, another through Scotland, and the last in Ireland. It was the first time I had done something for me and by me in my life. Near the end of the first month I woke up in my tent at the caravan park in the early morning, pain from my testicles into my stomach and around my back. I went to hospital and was examined - testicular torsion; my tubules which carried seminal fluid tangled with veins carrying my blood. Liquids of life, crossed - potential death of a testicle. Prepped for emergency surgery, on morphine, in the cradle of that country's socialized health care system, I went under. I never went under the knife at birth, having the foreskin preserved where it had grown. My trip was over the moment I woke up with this, my first genital wound, ^{but} feeling like I'd won some Tour de France when the doctor said there had been only a 40% chance of success. I was going home.

*

THROUGH THE PERFECTION OF VICTORY THEY ACHIEVE
HEALTH, BUT THE SOUL ENTERS THROUGH THE HOLE OF DEFEAT.

- from *Iron John* by Robert Bly

*



TRANSFORMATION



"Wake, brother, wake! See the butterfly that clings to my walking stick!"

2.

5.

The toxicity of masculinity is important as an indicator of so many things acidic in our Western American culture: systemic racism, inadequate mental and physical health services, outdated gender roles, one-dimensional cultural constructs, egoic nationalistic pride, and the inability to process grief in the face of loss. It's also an expression of fear that as the hegemony of patriarchy is shaken up and loosened, what has been unexamined and assumed of masculinity will fall away. Before my father died, we had close to a decade of meaningful but difficult exchanges. After his divorce, he began a work, reluctantly at first, of letting go. The fear of what would happen when he let go was always present in our talks and visits, but witnessing him and trying in my own work to forgive, helped us both. For years, I struggled with my maleness, loathing it because I thought it could only reflect the sick man who helped raise me, that the well was poisoned. But masculinity is beautiful, can shine, does heal, and needs the support it finds so hard to accept while it's in crisis. This was a preface to a work on masculinity. The work remains.

4.



↑
THE AUTHOR, AGE 6

In Memoriam

ROBERT ALAN BURNS
1959 - 2020

1. When you are upset by something don't internalize your anger
2. Anger is a cancer that eats the soul.
3. If your proposed marriage partner is not in agreement with you on spiritual and personal matters, you need to postpone the wedding and work it out.

- List of lessons written for his memoir's postscript, found among ~~the~~ ^{his} final writings

COMETS ARE THE SPERMATAZOA OF UNIVERSE



G *D.* **B**
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@dawnzerlylight (IG)

/ garydaleburns.com

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