



THE FROMM INSTITUTE  
FOR LIFELONG LEARNING  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

# FROMM FOCUS

The Newsletter of the Fromm Institute

Issue #3 • April 29, 2020

## WORKING FROM HOME...

Dear Fromm Members – Just to say, we are thinking of you. We have been adjusting to the times as well as any I suppose; feeling fortunate to work, feeling a little lost, concerned, and curious about creative ways to tackle mindset and purpose. While working from home, I have had time to think and reflect, and wish to share my musings with you...

*Looking forward to when we all meet again, Carla*

[Click here to listen to the poem](#)

## WORKING FROM HOME – A PROSE POEM

*by Carla Hall*

How does one cultivate the need for ease when things fall apart? Is there a posture? An ergonomics, a zoom webinar? From my new office at home, I have a stickie attached to my desktop computer. I gaze at it for correct neck and shoulder alignment: “Never let anyone rob you of your peace...” Paramahansa Yogananda’s voice in my head followed by the ellipses of unknowns. There is a google calendar I follow, a diary calendar I scribble, an office flip-a-week I jot, and days merge like numbers on a science chart I once knew by heart. Numbers of reported cases, numbers of deaths, numbers of countries and states in lockdown, numbers of days in self-isolation. They talk about the curve, and I wonder how that feels. One wants to build a cushion for the seat of the soul. That’s the curve. To sit silent and watch the baby blue sky of pink silk clouds at dusk signal that we alas enter the quieter frame of the day. By day 27 I have begun to sort out piles of old bills and letters. I’ve organized food and beverages in the refrigerator, scrubbed the pastel pink tiles in the bathroom, ignored emails from neighbors about non-essential deliveries and visitors, and counted the leaves on replanted succulents. Not to mention work. And walk. And read. And visiting the ‘adopt-a-pet’ website a gazillion times. Concepts like money and relationships couple in my brain like proton and neutron. Are they facts? Are they tangible? Are they traceable? Can I drink them like a warm cup of chamomile or a cool elixir of kombucha? At night, drifting to sleep, the big connections like who do I hold dear, how will I spend the latter half of a my life, what matters, what thread of color are my loves and how do the shapes on this page in the time of a pandemic mate with comforts anew? Aqua blue bed sheets, off-white linen curtains, music lists decades old, dancing alone in undone hair and kitten heals, neon lipstick, bangles and snagged leg warmers. Undone. No one’s watching. Quick. Cat nap. I have studied literature and poetry because I live it. The tenderness of a phrase of light gleaning through the window as it heads north. Sun then moon, then sun, then moon. Waxing and waning have spoken their symbiosis to me, like a lullaby nothing like fear. Nature is on vacation from us, the fecund ocean air as the fog rolls in tells me so. The afternoons are most tense with heat and calendar and emails and texts and I wander through personal/professional space like running into glass, then liquid, then pillows of thought. Indulgences I’ve grown attached to. Then curiosity, heading, into sunset. And a narrative of imagination impelled by breath runs through every limb, body, life, cosmos, dimension seen and unseen. That this kind of mulling chronology – poetry really – might ease what really is going on, worldwide. What is surreal. Really. This too. Aforementioned. Shall pass.

THE FROMM INSTITUTE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

2130 Fulton Street San Francisco, CA 94117-1080 | 415 422 6805 (t) fromm@usfca.edu (e) fromminstitute.org (w)

## SAN FRANCISCO VILLAGE

**San Francisco Village** (<https://www.sfvillage.org/>) is right down the street from USF and currently serves many Fromm Institute students. Their purpose is to connect older adults to the community, resources, and expertise they need to live independently as they age. They have 375 older adult members throughout the city and a volunteer corps of more than 150. If you or someone you know need help at this time, or just generally, please feel free to reach out to the good people at San Francisco Village. They offer graduated-fee memberships no higher than \$50 per month for individuals, or \$62.50 per month for a household. All their volunteers undergo background checks and training. To join as a member, please visit <https://www.sfvillage.org/join/>.



If you are interested in volunteering, it would be very easy for you to sign up. They welcome short- or long-term volunteers to help with simple things like friendly phone calls or more complex tasks like grocery shopping. Please visit their website at <https://www.sfvillage.org/volunteer/>.



**The San Francisco Conservatory of Music** has created a series, **Tiny Dorm Concerts** in which students and faculty perform live from their dorm rooms or offices. They will be inviting our community to take part in these live virtual performances and an email

regarding this will be sent out shortly, previewing the month of May's lineup. In the meantime, you can still enjoy listening to students and faculty from the Conservatory on their YouTube page. There you can find a collection of faculty interviews, April's Tiny Dorm Concerts and other special projects. Point your browser toward <https://www.youtube.com/user/sfcmmedia/videos> for some wonderful student driven music.

## SFMTA CREATES HELPFUL ETC PROGRAM

**San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA)** has created an **Essential Trip Card (ETC) Program** which offers a deep discount to help seniors and people with disabilities make essential trips in taxis within San Francisco during the Covid-19 crisis.

The ETC program subsidizes 2-3 taxi round trips per month for persons 65 and older, and people with disabilities. They pay 20% for essential trips (grocery store, pharmacy or medical trip) during the stay-at-home period. Riders must make only essential trips, wash hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer before and after trips, as well as take the other city mandated precautions (e.g. wearing a face mask).

To apply, call **311 weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 4:45 p.m. and mention the Essential Trip Card Program**. More details can be found at their **website**.

<https://www.sfmta.com/getting-around/accessibility/paratransit/essential-trip-card>

# AT HOME AND DIGGIN' IT!

by Jan Wahl

There are ways to be hunkering down at home and actually have moments of out loud laughing. I just did it by watching a **YouTube** hour of **The Very Best of Mel Brooks** and the **SNL.com Celebrity Jeopardy**. At a time when even the staid *Motion Picture Academy* is changing its rules to include streaming films and video on demand, it is time to get creative and go deeply into some powerful, engrossing or just plain fun entertainment.

It's a time to see the new movies that some streaming services are offering to us. **Amazon** has just come out with a terrific Coen Brothers style drama: **Blow the Man Down**. Written and directed by Danielle Krudy and Bridget Cole, we are transported to a remote fishing town in Maine. Two sisters have to discover the sordid underbelly of their neighbors and relatives as they try to conceal a grisly murder. Surprising and filled with great character actors and actresses.

Ready for a longer, stranger ride? How about the isolated Faroe Islands in the 1800's? Halfway between Iceland and Denmark, a family on this beautiful but desolate land are forced to make a decision about sex, siblings and land ownership. **The Birdcatcher's Son**, written and directed by Richard Hobart, is a travel and escapist drama, that will keep you away from the news for at least two hours.

Isolation is a tough one for all of us. This could be a chance to give yourself a Film Festival: the films of Billy Wilder, Greer Garson, Tyrone Power, Sports Movies, Comedies, Bay Area films, etc. Then start a Film Club with your friends on your computer and compare notes with them after you have viewed and agreed upon movies. Everyone is a critic at heart...so why not celebrate and connect?

There are free streaming services everywhere. The **Lark Theatre** in Larkspur has announced some good films for you. The 1994 **Little Women** (as good as the recent one), **Roman Holiday** and others always being added. **Randy Rainbow's** brilliant musical parodies are free. **Broadway HD** and **Playbill.com** have Broadway shows available, from Sweeney Todd to the restaged Oklahoma. Museums are giving us MOMA, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, The San Diego Zoo and even a soothing fish tank in Monterey Bay.

Pony up \$19.99 and download **AMC Theatre streaming Emma, Knives Out, The Irishman** (finally, a reason it is 3 and a half hours...what a rest from the real world!), **Peanut Butter Falcon** and **1917**. Google Marin's own brilliant documentary *Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound*. Or groove to musical storytelling like **Miles Davis: Birth of the Cool, Linda Ronstadt: The Sound of My Voice, Gay Chorus Deep South** or **Pavarotti**. Google these titles and Amazon awaits you.

This list goes on forever, but I would be sorry to pass along my current favorite. Netflix is now streaming a series I've waited a long time to see. **Self-Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker** stars Octavia Spencer as the first female millionaire in America. I've been hearing about this incredible inventor and philanthropist since I was a little girl, and these shows would make her proud.

Hats off to great entertainment during the times we really need it!



This first Spring 2020 *Fromm Focus* featured section, **Express Yourself**, is a review by FISA secretary and coordinator of *Matinée*, (the after school movie series) **Maxine Einhorn**. Submissions to **Express Yourself** are accepted on a rolling basis and can be articles, opinion pieces or notes, written by you, the students or others in our community, who want to share something with the larger Fromm Institute community. Email your submissions to **Scott Moules**, in the Fromm Institute office ([fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu)).



## RE-PRESENTING HISTORY – WATCHING “A FRENCH VILLAGE” ON TV

BY MAXINE EINHORN

Working at KQED in the Education Department for some years, I ran a workshop series for teachers about the way history is represented in the media. The idea was to use PBS programming such as “Independent Lens” or “Frontline World” to explore media literacy with educators, looking at how history is re-presented through the eyes of historians, film-makers, newscasters, politicians and ordinary people, etc. Historical representation offers interpretations and versions of past events. Whose history is it? Looking at “A French Village” on Prime I’m wondering about these questions again.

“A French Village” is a brilliant and complex reconstruction of a fictional French village, Villeneuve, during World War II. The village is situated to the north of Vichy close to the French Swiss border and occupied by the German Nazi regime from 1940-1944. Vichy was the puppet state headed up by Marshall Petain.

This is a series that needs commitment and time – which we have for sure while sheltering in place. There are 72 full episodes and 18 short oral history segments, testimonies from resistance fighters, Jews, French police, hostages, collaborators, communists and many, many more who lived through the occupation. Each one offers a perspective on the events, their experience and choices and, of course, their suffering.

Having watched half of the series the characters now feel like relatives as they balance tortuous options in everyday life under occupation. We see dramatized the effect on marriages, complex sexual entanglements, the relations between German occupiers and the French police which startled me most. The French police are shown to be absolutely ruthless in rounding up Jews and resistance fighters. The series dramatizes how ordinary people behaved, their compromises and sacrifices; the mayor who is also the town doctor, the

school principals and business owners as they face terrible moral choices each day. We watch the Jews rounded up and deported, their children torn from them; and we see the courage of resistance fighters working somewhat awkwardly with the communists.

Whose story is this? It is a richly textured, nuanced account. We get multiple viewpoints, multiple choices that lead to compromise and doom, and we get incredible bravery. We also get loads of sex going on despite all the terror; it is French of course, but the eagerness for sexual liaisons is pretty impressive at this time.

Although this may sound dark as a serious history of wartime collaboration, it is sympathetic to the ordinary people being tested by war. The characters win your care and concern as you enter the complexity and challenge of history through their stories. You want to know what happens and how French TV represents the past. But this is also raw history and it feels like a moral challenge. What would we have done if tested this way?

*Un Village Français* (A French Village) is a French television drama series created by writer Frédéric Krivine and director Philippe Triboit, with the historical consultant Jean-Pierre Azéma.

## IN THE VIRTUAL GALLERY

### CALLING ALL FROMM INSTITUTE VISUAL ARTISTS

We can't be together at The Fromm Institute until at least the Fall, so we won't have access to the Maier Hallway Gallery. The space is always interesting, intriguing and even enlightening to walk down - experiencing your fellow students creativity. That doesn't mean we have to live without art. If you are a creator of images, paintings, photos, film, sound, etc. and would like to share your work with the larger Fromm Institute community why not consider submitting some digital images or digital files of your work to the **Fromm Focus**.

Depending on the number of submissions, the *Focus* could publish a special edition with a wide selection of work from you, the students. Or, the work can be placed in weekly future issues of the the newsletter accompanied by a brief statement by the artist. We are also looking for work that can be included in upcoming editions of our catalogs.

Send images, sound files, links to webpages, or links to moving art/movies to gallery coordinator, **Scott Moules** at the general Fromm Institute email box ([fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu)). Any type of art will be considered - photos of sculpture, links to digital projects, traditional media, etc. If you have exhibited in the gallery in the past, don't consider yourself to be excluded from this project. We are happy to showcase you and the wonderful work you make.

## KEEPING IT LIGHT

Here's a light-hearted approach to self-quarantine. This email has been bouncing around the internet and it found its way into the Fromm Institute email box ([fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu)). We all need a good laugh, so send us your jokes or humorous ruminations to the email address above.

## THE UNWELCOME REPLY

*by Andrew Fraknoi*

Trans-World Science Foundation Director Hayashi Itokawa was known for getting down to business. “Dr. Kaufmann,” he asked as soon as his guest had sat down, “How sure is your team that you have interpreted the message correctly?”

Bill Kaufmann tried to compose himself and not start with the first sarcastic response that came to mind. As if his team had not spent hours going through all the ways they might have gone wrong before ever putting together that damn report!

What he replied was, “Well, as you can imagine, the team was asking itself that question regularly. As we explain in our report, we had the best civilian and military code-breakers form three teams and work separately. All came up with essentially the same interpretation. The damn aliens made it easier by using many of the characteristics of the old message from Earth that they picked up.”

Thinking this was still a bit strong, he added, “Director, I know this message is not what anyone was waiting or hoping for. We have struggled with other possibilities, including the suggestion by Dr. Kavanaugh that it's a practical joke or initiation prank played by an older civilization on a naïve younger one. With this in mind, we have been waiting to see if the message changes to some other contents. But this is all they keep sending, month after month.”

He paused, but decided to say a bit more, “Still, the message is of enormous scientific value. Provided it's on the level, it not only tells us we are not alone in the Galaxy, but helps us calibrate the frequency of intelligent life for the first time. And it strongly implies that technological life is more common than even the most optimistic interpreters of the Drake Equation ever thought.”

Itokawa did not look the least mollified. “Yes, but to send such a reply. Did they not realize its effect on the morale of the recipients?”

Kaufmann knew what he meant. His assistant had spent many hours online and considerable sums buying sweet snacks at the Farside Bakery. Anything to cheer up his team as the analysis continued. “Director, the team's best answer to that is to point to all the species of life we have allowed to go extinct on Earth. Sometimes, in our rush toward progress, it's easy to forget where we came from.”

“But those were animals or plants. Here we are talking about species that have constructed advanced radio telescopes and built up an understanding of astronomy. Don't these creatures have a feeling for the harm such a message can do?”

Kaufmann's team had debated that question from many angles. The easiest answer was to point to analogous human behavior, of course, but everyone had assumed that interspecies behavior would be guided by the better angels of everyone's nature.

"Director, I know what you mean. We all felt that way. But they may simply value truth more than the niceties of conversation."

Itokawa looked at him for a while before speaking. With a flick, he brought up the message up on the tri-d platform next to his desk. "And what niceties of conversation do you suggest I use when I show this to the Director-General and the Council?"

Kaufmann knew Itokawa's reputation well enough to realize that he was not just making a point about the situation they were in, but genuinely trying to find a way out of what would be a politically hazardous meeting for the Foundation. Trans-World Director-General Agrawal was actively trying to build a "good news administration" after all the years of bad news that the Earth and its colonies were just learning to reverse. The human species was only now emerging from decades that had demanded enormous societal and personal sacrifices.

"I wish I had an easy answer to that. I would stress the good news about our not being not alone... Even if our place in the scheme of things is perhaps not as we would want it to be."

After a moment, he added, "And this discovery means the investment in the array of radio dishes on Farside has been justified." As soon as he said it, he realized how petty and self-serving this sounded.

Itokawa sighed, and said, "Dr. Kaufmann, I know there is a long tradition that warns us not to blame the messenger for the message. It's not your fault, or the team's fault, that this is the first reply we got. Maybe we shouldn't have sent messages a century ago to all those possibly habitable planetary systems. Still, you can't blame me for wishing that this answer had come at a different time."

"No sir," Kaufmann replied, "but there really never would have been a good time for this message, would there?"

Itokawa didn't seem to have an answer for that, so he simply turned to the tri-D. Together they read again the first alien message humanity had ever received:

***Best Translation of the Scorpius Message:***

***Dear Intelligent Beings:***

***We have received your transmission. Your message is important to us. Regrettably, your message has arrived at an unusually busy period. Many messages have reached us from the outer parts of the Galaxy at approximately the same time. We answer all messages in the order they are received, and will respond to yours as soon as our staff has the time. Currently, wait times for a response are approximately 500 orbital periods of your planet.***

## ...AND FINALLY

This past Friday we had our virtual staff meeting and Herbert took a screen shot of our Zoom. Though we are all smiling, we really were talking business: making plans for our very first Summer Session (*more on that soon*), discussing the popularity of the Frommcast, and strategizing the Fall Session. We wanted to share the image with you as a big hello from us and say we are working hard at getting everyone safely back to classes at The Fromm Institute.

