CRITICS WHO KNOW JACK
URBAN MYTHS, MEDIA AND ROCK & ROLL
Thanks and love to all!

‘I don’t really wanna stop the show
but I thought you’d all like to know
that the singer’s gonna sing a song
and he wants you all to sing along...’

—Lennon and McCartney

Tune into Joseph.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sAS0a65nPE
or scan the QR Code.
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Introductions are never easy. I remember the last time I met a woman I came to spend a few years with. A friend who was attending an event with me called me over, saying there was someone I should meet. I was busy with the antipasto and wine and my hand was getting fairly oily from the sun-dried tomatoes. In any case, I rushed over to my friend's side and he said: “This is _______.” And before I could wipe my hand down on a superbly inefficient mini-napkin, there it was. Oil all over her right palm though I had tried in earnest to lose the oil in a couple of hand shakes leading up to that sort of fateful hand-shake.

Introductions are never easy. Read any introduction to a translation of Dante’s Divine Comedy and you will feel nausea (unless maybe you wrote it). I prefer liner notes. Like you would find on old vinyl 33 and 1/3rd long-playing record covers. Or compact disc collections. Though I preferred...
Go to the cabin in the woods again. Go because you can’t be online and there is no service provider but with your fingers on a portable typewriter, letting your grade ten fingers tap the night away against the glow of candles and kerosene lamps. Shave by moonlight and think of Warren Zevon’s Werewolves of London then The Clash’s London Calling.

Get back to the city and rent all the available episodes of The Fugitive in black and white and don’t pay attention to federal election results. Play a couple of club concerts and run home and try to visualize what a text on all this would run like. Feel ornery because the personal computer gives off too much light and underlines your whole text in red and green. Be grateful that when you write poems or songs on your PC you use caesuras and the PC doesn’t know how to underline them. See all the artists in the neighbourhood in beachcomber slacks and Frank Sinatra hats, gawking at the well-toned Victorian houses and whisper how they got to get one. Dig French, Italian and Spanish radio programming. It seems only the English stations have mile long ads. Re-watch the moon landing of nineteen-sixty-nine. Have more espresso. Try and follow the lines on the latest tattoos on folks in the neighbourhood and think sailors and Moby Dick’s “cannibal” Queequeg and bad CSI programs where the technology acts better than the actors (including actresses). They are bad in both genders. Avoid the annual Film Festival at all costs ‘cause it costs too much! Chase down the ice-cream truck where a cone costs a dollar and half compared to the three dollars and fifty cents it costs for a badly made gelato. Eat hazelnuts instead. Visit organic markets and grow tomatoes and eggplants. Only withdraw enough money from your ATM each day and not enough for a week ‘cause you will spend it all in a day. Leave your bank card at home after you do and let your credit card sit tucked and warm in your wallet at home next to your passport for a real decent other country getaway.

A set of titles coming in early one spring morning. Walking along in the chilly April air and titles coming like lines in a poem. Tumbling in one after another after days of reading, watching TV news and DVDs. Listening to CDs. Playing guitar and walking to parks on the way to cafes or walking to cafes on the way back from parks. Dodging dogs and their leashes. Moving my foot out of the way from an on-coming pram. Remembering MAD magazine and running the neighbourhood streets with my older brother. Getting a song on a Juno Award-winning CD compilation. Being asked to play a song I dedicated to my father for his retirement for the umpteenth time. Watching the umpires tolerate the shenanigans of Major League Baseball players. Digging Coltrane as I turn down the volume on World Cup Soccer. Spending time in a cabin in the woods. Watching a snake slither down a tree and then up again (no apples in sight) and shed its skin.

Think of a day that doesn’t exist. Out of time. June 31st, 7 o’clock in the afternoon. When to write the titles out into segments. Think semiotics and Marshall McLuhan. Think of the last time a critic for any medium sat like a fat calf expert, collecting his or her wage for the weekly column while an artist waits on grant submission replies and eats dark bread for protein. Read Dylan Thomas, Walt Whitman, Dante, Auden, Ginsberg and The New York Times again and again. Listen to everything from Leadbelly to Paul Robeson. Then Zimmerman Bob and BRUUUCE and Lennon and meet a woman who wants to sleep in a “tantric” sort of way and whisper “unlunar” incantations (apologies to T.S. Eliot). Dig the moon landing and the radical nature of the New Left circa 1968.

Meet another woman who works as a therapist but is into conspiracy theory. Visit the “pining” west coast of Canada. Read MAD magazine again. Have more great espresso and try not to spit out the bad ones in public. Go to the cabin in the woods again. Go because you can’t be online and there is no service provider but with your fingers on a portable typewriter, letting your grade ten fingers tap the night away against the glow of candles and kerosene lamps. Shave by moonlight and think of Warren Zevon’s Werewolves of London then The Clash’s London Calling.

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• • •
A flock of starlings has just flown over the cabin. Here, deep in the woods, they all sing the same song. All look the same. Probably have names only they know to themselves but in ways we have trouble understanding. And they flock from tree to tree and whoosh up in unison, scattering a few autumnal leaves about, casting a buzz into the late afternoon air. I am lucky, I say. This was not a show I knew anything about. I didn’t have a dial or remote to check out what was on. Didn’t even have a TV on to tell of the coming feathered friends. Totemists must have an answer for this. Thousands of black starlings must mean something more than migration and, if only migration, that must mean something. This is way beyond espresso and may require a good scotch or grappa! I sip and frolic in their frolic. This is paradise and there are no apples except for a few I picked up on the ride in.

Punctuation and happiness! Exact winds twirling the leaves up and down and bringing on the clouds and rain! Ecstasy! In the beginning there was no apple and no worm! No serpent and no William Jennings Bryan. Nor Clarence Darrow. There may have been Dharma and the self-referential wallowing of cooing doves. The attraction without apples and parentheses that crept up on us like a good landscape will. At times we are convalescing. At times we thrive! May our dreams be vigorous with peace and stretched-out in the morning across open plains. No heed and no redemption. Live in amaze and hum in bliss!

Introductions are never easy. The stage awaits. It’s time for sound-check.

THE FUGITIVE

(DTV Program)

David Jansen — Richard Kimble — always running — a man of health (a doctor) and his future is a question and in turn, day to day, a quest. He fights against injustice first personally and then professionally as a doctor — he has taken “oaths” to care for those that require healing — a healing most distinct — the healing of others’ projected morality. And those that wait in the unconscious valley of their fears have the choice to turn him in or raise their souls to a humanity and humility rarely seen in latter day dramas. Where the pursued is definitely of evil sensibility and the pursuit of the criminal is cast in “black and white.” Raising our need to blame regardless of the corruption of our senses. Our honour and our “biblical,” our popular beliefs about ourselves as individuals, yet citizens. This
In the “days of Kimble,” governments were not generally perceived by the public as corrupt entities. The period of 1962 to 1966 was a period of growth and prosperity, and in turn, trust for most of America. Or at least, the aspiration towards a good, honourable life was in the air. Kimble was the great American loner. Forced to be by circumstance. His appeal to us was that he was able to wander, change jobs, meet other women (or men), see the country and the city (albeit through the constant fear of capture). Inventiveness, tenacity and courage added to his Hippocratic oath. Gave him a mantle through which we could see the foibles and honour in our system of morality. We were asked indirectly: What would you do in Kimble’s situation? Would we want the benefit of the doubt? Would we want ourselves turned in if we knew we had not done wrong? And further: Was it our civic duty (Lt. Gerard) to turn him in or could we judge situations for ourselves and substantiate our capacity for reasoning and critical thinking and a sense of judgment not dependent on the courts of law?

Richard Kimble’s moments of grace came from his actions (this being the ingenuity of his creators). To create adventure and through that adventure have us as viewers possibly philosophize and moralize in witness to his behaviour. We could at once “be him” and then “be other”—other being a good citizen and turn him in? Or an understanding citizen and help him hide or escape? A runner from false accusation or simply William Conrad’s narrative voice of stark reality, sub-textually saying: Look at the horror this man faces day to day while you cut your front lawn and trim the hedges and go on vacation.

The remake or film version starring Harrison Ford cast Kimble further along into the twentieth century (the nineteen-nineties). It is noteworthy that the character as interpreted by Ford moved day to day with fear and a sense of being wronged but rarely did his performance show the subtlety of Jansen through humility and slight movement of eye or lips and awkwardness as though written by Franz Kafka. Ford’s performance was fear and a sense of revenge
towards the one-armed man for having made his life difficult. Jansen’s pursuit of the one-armed man was not vengeance but a desire for relief and a return to normalcy. Ford’s performance was more superficial. Ironically a more “black and white” representation of Kimble’s core.

In short, the story was as important as the character in Jansen’s version. As a weekly series, he had the advantage of developing the character over the period of six years whereas Ford had a one time (two hour) shot at Kimble. And the “neatness” of presentation by the TV producers and directors, giving us four acts and an “epilog” suggested to us theatre and tragedy and possible resolution to the circumstances Kimble faced. Even as commercial breaks came along, you had the drama brought to a sense of crescendo by the dominant musical score beginning and ending each “Act.”

The period The Fugitive was created and filmed in must be stressed here. Early mid-60s America was a time of liberalism coming out after a fear-driven 1950s. The rebel was more than revered through the performances of Marlon Brando and James Dean, and the films about marginalized characters directed by Elia Kazan. The music of the time and culture at large found determined concern with civil rights and non-conformity. By design Kimble was in some ways “the outsider” of Camus. The rebel of the times though he did come from the establishment (a doctor) to begin with. And he was Kerouac’s Sal Paradise on the road and also a Hemingway/Faulkner-type protagonist. Almost at times righting wrongs by his movement to claim his prior life. But he was not the rebel of provocation and causelessness. He was driven by a personal sense of freedom from false accusation and in turn, became an anti-anti-hero. He chased bikers and carried some of the Republican John Wayne in him, balanced by being forced (by necessity not pleasure) “onto” the road.

THE SPIRIT OF ABBIE HOFFMAN

The ultimate American rebel! Make that American shit disturber to many! Instigator — provocateur — athlete — media hip — manic depressive — fighter for justice — street-smart and well-educated — Abbie Hoffman was the best known American rebel since the agents of The Boston Tea Party and Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Hoffman, having grown up in Worcester, Massachusetts and attending Brandeis University (the hotbed of Jewish-American intellectualism and liberal thought), spent his early years trying to make it in small business (and with girls), wrestling through high school and trying to out-smart the next street hustler (with whom he found kinship) as the politics of civil rights and anti-establishment sentiment grew on the horizon.
So what did it take to be a citizen of America in the 1960s to mid-1970s compared to today? One distinct current was an age differential between World War Two parents and their offspring, whereas the movements of 2008 and even the 1990s saw the generations of the ‘60s and ‘70s become the “older” generation. Wars (as in Vietnam) existed as do wars today (Afghanistan and Iraq). What changed? What would make a man with the political and street theatre chops of Abbie Hoffman be the odd man out in today’s America? Or would he be? Is the current again changing to a counter-establishment premise? And what would Abbie, an American Jew, make of or feel about the Arab-Israeli conflict and the incursions on civil liberties many Arab and Muslim Americans (and other citizens) face within the Babylon of the war against terror?

Hoffman’s radicalism was no doubt more authentic compared to the posed rock & roll “stance” of, say, The Rolling Stones. Perhaps closer to the essence of Thoreau and Whitman mixed in with Allen Ginsberg and the Beat writers, and the Jewish-American tradition of 1930s socialism, he finds his channelling? — what he drew from to expose America’s fascistic tendencies. What makes a man get arrested time and time again for saying: Stop the War!?

What makes a man turn cartwheels after his arrest while protesting the capitalist establishment of the New York Stock Exchange and throw dollar bills down from the gallery to the men in suits and ties below? Could it be Abbie was thinking of the poem by W.H. Auden where, in honour of W.B. Yeats, he says:

\[\text{And when the Frenchmen are roaring like beasts on the floor of the Bourse ... some one will remember this day ...}\]

Revolution was not just for the hell of it as Abbie said — and yet he did make it fun. The generation he grew up in allowed for fun.

Yes fun! Even in revolution! The media allowed for it. The play of visual and the lights of television screens made revolution something you could see day to day. Add to that the joy and explosive nature of the “new” rock & roll and its never-ending exploration of the subconscious coming to the surface in chrysalises of expression both musical and word-ly — and you have something to invest in as a youth movement. A great sense of space for “fun” not to be ruined by the greed of war and un-required disciplines from earlier (post WW2) times.

Spoils? Spending a lifetime on the run for standing up to the lies of the country’s leaders is hardly a manifestation of living the spoiled life. Master of Agit-Prop and street theatre, Hoffman knew how to create a character that was both outspoken and to address the political issues of the day through a complex consideration of “sign and symbol.” He knew the semiotics of effect and the nature of the American media. Fickle for a storyline that showed the counter-culture as unruly, long-haired and “un-American.” Hoffman played off this media need brilliantly time and time again. He became the darling of the “radical chic” and in truth was offered substantial contracts to become a television icon and fashion gadfly for the commercial enterprises wanting to take full advantage of the “youth dollars” the generation was born into. His American-flag shirt was replicated again and again (similar yet more political than Peter Townshend’s of The Who, and his Union-Jack jacket). This proved Hoffman’s great sense of the theatric that the press and commercial interests were eager to pursue and cash in on.

To be defiant was cool and hip yet underlying this “attractive” stance, Hoffman had political chops: a substantial activism based on socialist and other left-leaning ideological frameworks. The freshness or the newness of his antics was in great part the result of the time he lived and “worked” in. The explosion of media and
television. The rush to culture by a high percentage of Americans both young and old. Yet with Abbie, it did not stop at symbol. Risking his life, he and many other young Americans pushed Lyndon Johnson from the White House and helped end the Vietnam War through constant exposure of the hypocrisy and aggressive actions of the State. And with Richard Nixon’s paranoid presidency, demonstrations that swayed public and world opinion contributed to exposing Nixon’s larceny-driven morality and his eventual demise.

Hoffman committed suicide after years of being on the run. He had plastic surgery to change his well-known features and continued his activism even as a bipolar disorder consumed his once agile and clear, loving mind. Certainly if Abbie were around today he would be yelling: Steal This iPad! He made a forceful difference in American politics and culture and its says something that the country he was born in never found a way to honour his contrarianism and citizenry, as much as it seems to love its rebels and sense of integrity.

A film-maker in the neighbourhood I live in is always looking for the next good idea for an independent film and how to buy a house at the same time. His real work is doing some post-editing for bigger productions and a few hours a week in a bookstore as a clerk that allows him some part time to pursue his higher interest. His wife could have been a model but applies her congeniality to being a cultural administrator’s receptionist. Yet they struggle. Day to day they are seen morning, noon and evening consuming lattes and watching every new face that comes into the neighbourhood cafes. Their interest in meeting people has everything to do with: Who will be the next person who might be the light at the end of the tunnel? The great breakthrough person who will present an opportunity and moment
and iPads, why do we need the abbreviation? Where is it that we need to go that shortens language like a 10-4 Call Back highway rig steaming through NASCAR country? Does it put us in touch with anything we haven’t experienced or had knowledge of? Or does it simply underline our vanity and ultra-commercial lemming-ness?

Answer? It doesn’t seem to matter what we need as much as what we want, and language in flux is a great virtue. Yet when it leads to superficiality as in achromatic signage and pretentious cool-hip cliquishness, problems can develop in substance and cleverness as knowledge becomes isolated packs of syllables, and to some detriment, is imitated orally. Thus, the signage of app might be considered against the signage of \( E = MC^2 \). Most people are learning what an app is. Many assume to know what Einstein was saying. The former is a sign of little existential value wherein the latter relates the core to our understanding of the physical universe within and beyond our planet. Yet perhaps a function of an app could be to point you to a detailed reading of The Special Theory of Relativity.

The “danger” of course is that one reads the abbreviated version and ingests a generality re: the Theory and this can be related to any subject matter from Moby Dick to How to Play Chess Instructions. And further, what holds us back from abbreviating app even further to ap’? — a followed by a p with an apostrophe doesn’t seem to be taken yet in the English lexicon. Nor the computer-jargoned mindset? How does app win out? One might argue that it is a logical sequence to abbreviate the word.

Question: Why didn’t it exist before it appeared? It certainly wasn’t a street urchin who came up with the term and then it ascended the social ladder. In fact, it began at the top of the economic chain — i.e. corporations — and has infiltrated downwards much like the first television sets which were originally only affordable by the wealthy and a system of want and have across all

BARTHES. This most intriguing mid-twentieth century French semiotician and Marxist sits with his Gauloise-stained thumb and forefinger and considers the word apps. How to get around this abbreviation and return to the common sense full syllables of the word application? For the fourteen-millionth time he is brought to his Writing Degree Zero (the posit that a writer must just write without intent political, romantic, technically or otherwise for motivation) knees. Comment ce dit en français? asks this man who skinned the cat on the bourgeois pretensions of a Jules Verne and underlined the tenacity of Jean Arthur Rimbaud’s anti-Republicanism. “How do you say in French: Mon dieu! Quelle merde-de-cheval? Le mot en français c’est application!” Not some half-sized word made to forfeit the completeness of language, as deficient as the English tongue is! THE MEDIUM IS NOT THE MESSAGE!” Which remains constant in his head through his two-thousandth smoke of the week and parenthetical conjecture.

And what is the valued (in lay terms) significance of the word apps? Curiously it sounds like a type of snake (asp) if you say it fastenough, throw a little lisp in and you know your ophiology. Besides being a word that makes convenient the use of Apple computers
classes ensued. And beyond this class competitiveness is the corporate competitiveness that vies for our attention and often succeeds in getting our interest, and sometimes even our sympathy. Not unlike the way in which we become aficionados of a certain type of coffee. Or espresso machine. Or hockey stick. Or sports team.

We follow the label and in turn are labelled. No? Look at your latest apple or tomato or t-shirt or subway steps. Stickers — logos everywhere and ne’er a chance to think! I heard of a elderly woman who tripped and broke her hip trying to negotiate the subway stairs but couldn’t find them clearly because an image of leaves and gigantic words changed the colour and tone of the steps. Visually removing the angular risers. Soon afterward, a lawyer filed suit on her behalf against the advertisers and the local transit company.

TODD GITLIN. There is information and then there is gossip. There is political disagreement and then there is rumour. We are all susceptible to this with at least five senses. In his fascinating exposé about identity politics and political correctness, The Twilight of Common Dreams, Gitlin, a professor of Media Studies at Columbia and Berkeley, writes of the fall of the 1960s and early ’70s New Left. A later text (Media Unlimited) is dedicated to the study of media, in which he underscores the speed with which mass media has now situated itself as the heartbeat of contemporary western society. Gitlin studies the incremental increase in the ascension of images. From pre-historic cave drawings and the first European paintings to the imposition on rural, small-town culture by neon and the rapid transformation from electric (radio and TV and film) to the electronic (internet). He argues that the increase in external “signage,” particularly the speed, challenges the ability to not overcrowd the brain and allow the development and subtlety of critical thinking.

From Gitlin we get a sense that the information highway is loaded with waste product that takes on meaning simply because it exists and diverts attention from the substance of communication. A question to pose here after Gitlin’s consideration is: If the medium is argued to be the message, as McLuhan said, what is the message in the medium? One message is attainment. Another is attainment of power. Another is flooding and saturation. Another yet is loss of individuality and identity or the fight and struggle for it. And further, the making of new or hidden identity. Yet all this can not be done without the utilization and recognition of signs — micro, as in the compaction of internet sites and information, and macro, as in massive billboards on the sides of buildings in almost all modern downtown cities.

In studying the nature of political correctness, or what Gitlin calls “identity politics,” he speaks of the great divide that occurred for many in the New Left after years of focus and a determined common will to confront the established order that brought us the racism and Vietnam war in post 1950s America. He talks of how the New Left, disheartened by the rise of Reaganism, divided along colour and cultural lines. I.e.: A Chicano farmer and a draft dodger might have had a common interest in confronting laws and class oppression in an earlier decade but, as the decades advanced into the ‘80s and ‘90s, a self-centred interest took over most political and social groups. A “me first” as opposed to “we together” paradigm resulted.

The effects of this phenomenon was that an activist culture became easy prey for the divide and conquer mentality of the New Right. And with this, signage was used. Reagan, fatherly and folksy, became the saviour of the traditions and wholesomeness of America. Everyone else was caught trying to get in, as if coming home late and promising to cut the hedges and trim the lawn. The common dreams and aspirations of correcting the wrongs of the
previous social order that brought us greed, war and hatred fell wayward. With this, the spirit of the New Left was politically decimated.

One of the most intriguing ‘signs’ in the ‘60s was Muhammad Ali, three-time heavyweight champion. African-American, a member of the Nation of Islam and a draft-dodger, Ali represented the epitome of all that resisted external order in an effort to stay true to his beliefs (identity). Even in his later years, like Einstein, Ali has taken it upon himself to be a spokesman for the down-trodden and continues his anti-war pacifist stance through the Afghan and Iraq wars.

In cultural signage this is the polar opposite to the Sylvester Stallone characters of ‘80s movies, who is going to get all the reds and bad guys—as either a boxer or a mercenary. He is the wild west cowboy cleaning up the globe instead of the town. He is not James Dean trying to come to terms with loveless parents or Marlon Brando’s 

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tics, whatever vein (vain) they work in, seem to carry an authority of voice through their opinion and have been known to influence the course of an artist’s career. Enhance and deepen the richness of the work they criticize or analyze or destroy what they do not concur with. Inevitably this leads to a dicey relationship between artist and critic. And the question is asked here: Who is living off whom?

Let’s begin by assuming a situation that might have been part of history. And if not a part of historical fact, let’s theorize a bit to expound upon the inter-relationship between critic and artist. So—i.e.: A caveman draws the sketch of an antelope he hunts so as to remember it and to possibly show to other members of his clan. Even if he is alone, he records it for a functionality. The
function of recalling it. Can we assume that he has drawn this for any aesthetic purpose? That is, can aesthetic purpose be totally self-contained? That this caveman has done it for pleasure himself or for no higher purpose than merely the function of recording?

At some point along his history, the said caveman runs into another caveman and finds he is doing the same thing. Drawing with blood a sketch of an antelope. The first caveman then invites the second caveman to his cave to see his sketch and they agree it is the same animal they have both drawn. Soon the news spreads and they decide to go hunting together. They fail at finding any prey but, as the sun goes down each night, they sit and look at the drawing, either in caveman number one’s or caveman number two’s cave. They agree now on three things: that they both drew the same animal, that they should hunt together and that they look at their drawings together.

Later, in their hunt they hear rustling in a forest patch and the high whining sound of an animal. They run closer to the spot and see a third caveman lifting an antelope carcass onto his back and stumbling through the brush. Without fear, they run up to him. They communicate by signs and soon it is understood that they would like the third caveman to join them in either of their caves to see their drawing(s). Caveman number three, though he is carrying a heavy weight, agrees. Inside the cave, caveman number one wants caveman three to look at his drawing. Caveman three grunts and kinda laughs and jostles the weight on his shoulders but does not put it down.

Behind him caveman two is watching all this and in a jilt of jealousy at the communication between caveman one and caveman three, punches caveman three in the back and, as caveman three swirls around, caveman two picks up some dried brush and pushes caveman one aside, violently attacking the wall sketch and rubbing away most of it. Though they have no language (in the modern sense) among them, they begin to fight and argue, both gruntingly and physically. Caveman three falls to the ground with the dead antelope weight on top of him. Caveman two now grunts in no uncertain terms that the wall painting is no good. That the antelope on the ground is really good. Caveman one gets upset that his drawing is ruined. Thus a certain type of primitive criticism is born.

Fast forward to twenty-first century. An artist proposes to a national radio broadcaster an idea to interview critics from different fields of criticism—i.e.: music, theatre, dance, visual art, literature, multi-media et al. After all, what do we know about the critics around us? Where they trained? Who influenced them in their chosen fields? How they come to their decisions and authoritative voices? How did they acquire their platform to speak, offer opinion and influence?

Here Comes A Sign. In the course of the meeting, the broadcaster’s representative, a little known poet, and now in charge of acquiring ideas for new programmes, turns her eyes down, scribbles (God knows what?) and let’s the artist go on with enthusiasm, re: the possibility of the idea coming to light. The Sign—The Eyes Going Down. The artist can see now that she has scribbled nothing on her pad but her time for soccer-mom-ing later that afternoon. Her cell-phone rings and the meeting is cut short.

The Interview: The artist decides to hold a panel nonetheless with a music critic, a theatre critic, a dance critic and a film critic. Before the panel begins, they are all given envelopes with one image each and asked not to open them until a question is asked of them.

Artist (to Film Critic): You’ve been writing—how long now? Can you tell us how you came to interpret the Godfather Part 2 scene where Fredo cries out: “I’m smaahht! I was looked over! I’m your older brother, Mikey!” as one of latent homosexuality?
Film Critic: Actually, the semiotic variable is a continuum from his “gayness” in *Dog Day Afternoon*.

Artist: Isn’t *Dog Day* … after *Godfather Two*?

Film Critic: Oh my god! Yes! You’re right! Absolutely!! Right! Right on! Thank you!!

Artist: Getting back to the “gayness” factor? What did you mean? That Fredo loves his brother in a sort of Greek-like manner?

FC: You mean like Plato and Aristotle?

Artist: Well not really. More like a variation on Oedipus?

FC: Oh, oh!

Artist: Tell us. Where did you study criticism and who are your influences?

FC: You mean study? Where I went to College?

Artist: Yes.

FC: I was the rock critic for a regional magazine on the club scene. Mostly I liked The Doors. Some Grateful Dead. Can I open this *(referring to his envelope)* now?

Theatre Critic: Yes, why can’t we open them now?

Film Critic: *(Opening his ahead of time)* I don’t’ get it. What’s this? A painting? A monstrous figure biting into a smaller body? Dance? I’m …

Artist: Goya. *Saturn Devouring His Children*. How would you analyze it from a dance critic’s perspective?

FC: Oh, come on! The semiotic language in the shape. The still movement of the symbolic eyeless monster. The sign … the sign offers conjunction to the present-day slaughter of children throughout the world. The dance of the grotesque.

Artist: *(To film critic)* Where is it you said you studied?

FC: *(Opening his envelope)* Huh! A photograph of Al Pacino eating oysters on New York City’s Mulberry Street! Fantastic!

Music Critic: *(Opening his)* Nice. Nice. A copy of the set list for the last Mötley Crüe concert!

Artist: So, I guess everything is opened?

Theatre Critic: No. Mine isn’t. Should I …?

TC: I never studied anything. I used to write but didn’t get any of my plays off the ground and then this critic the same day I was gonna get engaged, died. And I was asked to maybe take over the column for a while ‘til a replacement came along and then — well my wife-to-be ran off with another guy … so — I got the job — so to speak.

Artist: Who was it that died?

FC: Martin Kay. He was the Arts Editor and covered almost everything in his time. Had studied at U. Berkeley in California. Then went on to the Northeast and wrote many essays on Film, Dance, Music and Theatre journals before his columns appeared. A real savvy guy who knew all the arts and earned his way by building up from the ground level. Stupendous!

Artist: Where is it you said you studied?

FC: *(Opening his envelope)* Huh! A photograph of Al Pacino eating oysters on New York City’s Mulberry Street! Fantastic!

Film Critic: *(Opening the last of the envelopes)* What’s this? *(He holds up a letter and then also looks at the reverse side)*

Artist: Photo of the Twin Towers going down with a mushroom cloud on the back.

FC: *(To the Artist)* Wow! Where? — when was this? What movie?
out why they recurred so close to the fact? Why you had them so early in life and then they returned? But they are the only two that ever happen. Again and again.

The therapist has heard all this from you before. Nothing she says suggests it will be any different. You don’t like to think this is the way the gods cut your cards but it sure seems that way. The therapist must be in on it. It being the world of your fear. The therapist is always present. You have determined the therapist is part of the conspiracy. You wish you were on something else. You try *Moby Dick* and *Don Quixote* and your eyes grow tired of waves, harpoons and windmills.

You are hollering down at a sidewalk thirty storeys below your feet. You grab onto a flagpole. Your hands are growing blue and numb. *Jump! Jump!! Jump!!!* you hear the holler from the small faces below. You let go and as you bounce to rest you see that the people holding onto the fireman’s safety net all have the same face. *I am home,* you say to yourself. The white frock that you see on yourself. The wheelchair. The smell of bad food. You will write a book about conspiracy theorists. You will begin after Jell-O is served. The Jell-O is lime green.

When you see the H on a weather map is that a symbol for a Hotel and is the L a symbol for fifty? *When in Rome do as the Romans do.*—which would be a lot better weather than the northern parts of the continent where this is being written from. So who was visiting Rome that gave way to that adage? Is this why Richard Nixon tried to eat with chopsticks in attempting détente with China in the 1970s? Is this what Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, the Bush Clan and a whole lotta other presidents meant or mean when they decided (decide) to *circumnavigate* the globe?

The phrase actually arose when St. Augustine asked St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, about eating habits as the bishop was preparing for a visit to the ancient capitol in 387 *Anno Domini.*
Should the icon be Allah or Jesus or Buddha or Jane (who's Jane)? And if I'm a Jane and I'm a man, what could that be saying? Would I get a job reporting the weather because of equal opportunity? Does it matter how wrong or right I am? And what if I'm left? Like left of centre (on the map usually west)? Is west left? Is left wrong? Is left gone? And so it's Tea Party time in America. Strange with all the Starbucks and Seattle's Best that we are returning to tea. Are we talking continental Indian teas? Can we still be using the word Indian? Do they make good tea in Cleveland 'cause they got Indians there and they swing bats? Like Tony Soprano!

In fact, there's a new line of bats at your local sporting goods store. They have The Canseco (big and lies a lot all over the field), The McGwire (doesn't say anything), The Barry Bond's BALCO Bat (signed by all the lawyers it took to get him off), and The Clemens (with which you are guaranteed to strike out — not a great seller). So who's right and who's left? The weatherperson (man/woman) telestrates your nearest hurricane, and they swirl counter-clockwise (left to right) in the Western Hemisphere and clockwise (right to left) in the Eastern Hemisphere. Thus confusing the geo-political issue more 'cause according to the smarties at the CIA the east (right) is where all the communists are who are (left). Though a look to Central and South America coughs up a few radicals to these settings.

I mean, wouldn't it have been a treat to see Hugo Chavez give the weather report? Like a Mr. Hyde to Chauncey Gardner's Dr. Jekyll. So the vagrancy of truth continues and it looks like it's a full moon tonight. Ah ooooh! And if we close all the blinds and drapes and shut ourselves in we can avoid the simple things we already know and are available and tune in for more commercials and watch, watch, watch the experts tell us which way the wind is blowing.

He didn't have a weather channel. No big Hs and Ls and swirling clouds and touch-screen radar with all sorts of allergy medication advertisements. He might have had pigeons but what did they know? Well, the flying kind anyway? There must have been some stoolies nonetheless in the high (poison this guy/poison that guy) intrigue of powerful Mother church. Speaking of immunity ... Well, let's get to that later.

So a weatherman (person) can be wrong most of the time and right some of the time and working all of the time. How do you get work like that and keep it? Getting something wrong so often and still being employed? I mean, it's valiant and all to show concern for our need to know what the weather is going to be like. To be informed. Like if there's a fire in the hills and it's going to come down and burn the cornfields. Or there's a volcano erupting a few mountains over and you gotta clear the village of all goats and children.

But in the city. Do you really need to know it's raining by TV, when you can look outside or hear the clatter on your roof? What's will all the information about the kids at the park at a festival of clowns or a big barbeque reunion? Isn't it about being sold the idea that you need to know things are good? The "comfort" being sold to you by programmers? Can't we just feel the weather in the city? I mean, what did we do before all the ads and traffic reports?

Notice that whenever there is a disaster (not unlike whenever there is a political assassination) the clips are repeated ad nauseam to the point that we numb up and switch the channel to anything that avoids the tedium. So what is it that makes us like this kind of programming and then turn from it as if we were denying we ever engaged in watching it? I mean, a weatherperson is telling you what everybody else is telling you. Thank god they haven't decided to put a happy face on the sun icons. What would they use for thunder? The face of Zeus? Then what happens?
Joseph Maviglia is a singer-songwriter, poet and essayist whose work has appeared in journals and media across North America and Europe. His tribute poem jazz dharma was commissioned by CBC’s The Sunday Edition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Alan Ginsberg’s iconic poem Howl. His latest CD is Angel in the Rain, and his song Father, It’s Time appeared on the Juno Award-winning compilation The Gathering. His composition, Calabresella/Sooner or Later, is featured in the film The Resurrection of Tony Gitone. A selection of his poetry will be published in Italy in the anthology A Nord del Sogno (North of the Dream). A collection of his poetry, A God Hangs Upside Down, was published by Guernica. He is presently working on a new collection of songs for a soon-to-be released CD.