

Process vs. Product

Issue 11, Volume 6



From the Lookout
Christopher Woods



Rain Day
Christopher Woods

Nonfiction

The Third Jewel	Chris Malcomb
On War and Remembrance	Ken Rodgers
Immaculate	Wendy Sumner-Winter
Spectacles of the Mind	Manda Frederick

Poetry

birds who eat flowers	ali lanzetta
Ars Botanica	Katharyn M. Browne
The B-Boy	Martha Grover
The Lonely Freedom	Chris Carosi
The Missing Person	Maureen Alsop
Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday	Eric Rawson
One Way of Looking at a Poet	Stephen Maurer
Atomic Gardening	Adam Strauss
The Story	Jennifer Skogen
Notes on Joan Crawford	Cedar Sigo
Untitled (NUJINSKY)	Cedar Sigo
Vinculum	Katharyn M. Browne
For Our Time	Dunstan Christopher
December 33	Jami Proctor-Xu
THE MOOR DANCES	Mark Boccard

Fiction

Apala	Jason Nemec
Maena	Susan Green
The Lonely Story	Mark Gozonsky

Home Improvements	Christine Meade
out back by the rabbit pen	Calder Lorenz
Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms	Andrew Valencia
Art	
Rain Day	Christopher Woods
From the Lookout	Christopher Woods
Elements	Tray Drumhann
The Sun	Andrew Topel
A Woman's Best Friend	Andrew Topel
Excerpts from <i>Letters Patterns Structures</i>	Andrew Topel
Yet Beautiful in its Decay	Surya Kalsi
Window with Clouds	Christopher Woods



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

From the Lookout

[Christopher Woods](#)



SHARE

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

[<Previous Work](#)[Next Work >](#)

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Rain Day
[Christopher Woods](#)

From the Lookout
[Christopher Woods](#)

Elements
[Tray Drumhann](#)

The Sun
[Andrew Topel](#)

A Woman's Best Friend
[Andrew Topel](#)

Excerpts from *Letters Patterns Structures*
[Andrew Topel](#)

Yet Beautiful in its Decay
[Surya Kalsi](#)

Window with Clouds
[Christopher Woods](#)

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)[contributors](#)[staff](#)[issues](#)[comments](#)[links](#)

[submission information](#)[email the webmaster](#)[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Christopher Woods

Christopher Woods is a writer, photographer and teacher. He lives in Houston and in Chappell Hill, Texas. His work has appeared recently in *Glasgow Review*, *Litchfield Review* and *Narrative Magazine*. His books include a prose collection, *Under a Riverbed Sky*, and a book of stage monologues for actors, *Heart Speak*. He shares an online gallery with his wife Linda at [Moonbird Hill Arts](#).

Artist's Statement:

What often interests me is the mysterious nature of landscapes and architecture. Much of my work is from a rural area in southeast Texas that was home to slaves, plantations and even a Union soldier POW camp. I keep this in my mind as I take photographs. Landscapes and old buildings have long memories. I try to capture the spirit of those memories. I think of it as a kind of duty.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Rain Day

Art

From the Lookout
Art

Window with Clouds

Art

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#) [contributors](#) [staff](#) [issues](#) [comments](#) [links](#)
[submission information](#) [email the webmaster](#) [email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Chris Malcomb

I welcome the first two jewels; I resist the third.

It's ironic, really. I enjoy being on retreat and appreciate the camaraderie with my silent partners. I welcome the vibrant, gentle energy of practice that accumulates in the meditation hall, how it calms and inspires me during the first golden breaths of dawn; and through the sleepy silence of the sun-baked afternoon; and as the air cools, the sky darkens, and cricket song becomes the soundtrack of our experience. In these moments, boundaries disappear. I am sitting. They are sitting. *No difference*. I am breathing. We are breathing. *No difference*. I feel accepted. I feel connected.

Or at least / won't. For me the sangha is as much an escape as it is a community. Maybe more. In silence, I needn't worry about small talk or nervous introductions. I don't have to feel tongue-tied around a beautiful woman, or jealous of some guy in his mid-twenties who has already traveled through India, or published a book, or found his life partner. Without the option to converse, I don't have to contend with the perpetual, aggressive worries of the world outside of retreat. *She's too attractive to be interested in me. He's probably got enough friends. That person seems more spiritual, or outgoing, or healthy, or intelligent, or confident, or comfortable in nature.*

Issue 11
Process vs. Product
Spring 2010

<Previous Work	Next Work >
Page 1 of 2 >>	
Nonfiction	
<div>The Third Jewel</div> <div>Chris Malcomb</div>	
<div>On War and Remembrance</div> <div>Ken Rodgers</div>	
<div>Immaculate</div> <div>Wendy Sumner-Winter</div>	
<div>Spectacles of the Mind</div> <div>Manda Frederick</div>	
Poetry	
Fiction	
Art	

special-ness or have a distant query about my family, but mostly I continue moving with quiet observation through the redwood buildings, shady forest paths, and curved walkways that lead to and from the day’s activities. It’s delightful, really, crossing the threshold into a new year as a silent, nameless party of one.

Well, almost.

I awoke to dissipating fog and a cool summer breeze on the morning of my thirty-third birthday. After the 6 a.m. meditation, I spent a few moments sitting at my favorite granite Buddha statue, warming myself in the rising sun. The Buddha’s eyes gazed downward towards a collection of offerings in his lap and at his feet: coins, small slips of paper containing prayers and mantras, sun-bleached photographs of monks, fragments of red string, sticks of incense, and several large, multi-patterned turkey feathers. I wanted to offer something. I considered returning to my room for a few coins, or removing the *mala* bead bracelet from my wrist. Instead, I found a smooth stone under a nearby tree, rubbed it with my thumb for a few moments, and then gently placed it on the Buddha’s knee.

I sat for another moment before rising and walking to the dining hall.

My breakfast that morning was a large bowl of oatmeal sprinkled with almonds, raisins, fresh granola, and vanilla yogurt. I sat at an unoccupied table and raised a spoonful of oatmeal and lifted it into my mouth. I felt the warmth of the cereal, the silky coolness of the yogurt, the plump juiciness of each raisin. I closed my eyes, chewed for a few minutes, and then retrieved another spoonful.

A few moments later, a tanned young man wearing a hemp shirt sat across from me. He placed a steaming mug of tea and a boiled egg on the table, and then reached into the pocket of his cargo pants, removing an orange. I stared at his hands as he peeled the fruit, gently stacking the strips of rind next to the egg. They were weathered, with calluses and cracked skin around the undersides of his knuckles and fingertips. He sectioned the orange with grace and power, his hands like those of a carpenter, mountaineer, or boat-builder. For a moment I thought I was looking at the hands of my only brother.



home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Switchback

The Third Jewel

Chris Malcomb

I hadn’t thought about him for the entire retreat. Now his presence consumed the space around me. I set my spoon down and stared at the hands across the table. I had seen these hands a thousand times. I’d looked at the mangled nails, the briar scratches, and the broken bones healed into awkward lumps. I’d felt them caress my hair and clench my throat. I’d held them at funerals and wiped them with antiseptic ointment while they lay limp in a hospital bed.

But what did I really know about those hands? Had I actually listened to the stories of those calluses, scrapes, and scars? Did I understand the life my brother was trying to build on the coast of Maine, 3000 miles away? Did I know what he truly *felt* while sanding the curved surface of a wooden sloop, scraping his knuckles as he constructed a stone sculpture on the beach, or feeling the stiff canvas of a sail as he cast off from shore, alone in his boat?

The man sitting across my table—on my birthday—was not my brother.

Why wasn’t he my brother?

My sense of balance disintegrated. What was I doing here? Why had I vowed silence and seclusion on this, of all days? There were people who loved me. People who knew—who cared—that it was my birthday. But these people weren’t here. No candlelit cake or wrapped gifts were coming through the swinging kitchen door. No chorus of well-wishing was going to pierce the silence. There would be no hugs, or smiles, or precious memories created. Suddenly, any connection I felt to the people around me—to the place, to the practice—wholly disappeared. I knew nobody here. Nobody knew me. I was alone in a room full of strangers.

I put down my spoon and peered into my bowl. The dining hall was filling, the sounds of scraping spoons and clanking dishes echoed off the walls. When the first tear dropped into my oatmeal, I knew I needed to bolt. Crying was not a problem on retreat. I’d heard the sniffles and sobs of people in the hall, byproducts of the practice unearthing deep layers of pain and grief and regret and sadness.

But I didn’t want to cry in front of these people.

I wanted to cry alone.

I rose quickly and walked to the door, leaving my bowl behind. I pulled my wool hat down over my forehead and stepped outside. The sun was up. The air was warmer. Directly in front of me was a trail heading up the side of a hill. *Perfect*. As I started up, my lower lip began to quiver. Something was coming, something that had been building without my knowledge. Whatever it was, I wasn’t going to resist it.

Suddenly, however, my attention was drawn to a movement in the high, golden grass to my left. I stopped and squinted. Five wild turkeys were walking in a line towards the meditation hall. They were beautiful, with large, buxom bodies and a patterned array of brown, auburn, and white feathers. They strutted confidently, bobbing their heads, clucking, and pausing periodically to claw at the dirt and peck at seeds in the dried grass.

Uh oh. Now I faced a dilemma. Should I continue up the hill for a solitary emotional breakdown or follow the turkeys for—something else? They were moving quickly. I needed to decide.

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

<< Page 2 of 2

Nonfiction

The Third Jewel

Chris Malcomb

On War and Remembrance

Ken Rodgers

Immaculate

Wendy Summer-Winter

Spectacles of the Mind

Manda Frederick

Poetry

Fiction

Art

http://swback.com/issues/011/third-jewel/2.html[7/10/20, 10:55:26 PM]

Wait. What would my brother do?

I followed the turkeys, padding up the trail as the first bird leapt from the hillside onto the redwood bench encircling the meditation hall courtyard. One by one, the others followed, sauntering towards the triangular reflecting pool in the corner. As the turkeys hopped from the bench and strutted towards the water, I sat down, leaned against a concrete planting box, and waited.

They approached slowly, each one leaping up onto the black tile edge with a slight flutter of its massive wings. Once balanced, the birds dipped their heads into the water for quick drinks. By now a silent crowd had gathered by the doorways and benches flanking the reflecting pool. Despite retreat rules for eye contact, I looked directly at a young woman sitting on the bench about ten feet away. We smiled and quickly returned our glances to the pool as the birds drank, lost their balance, and submerged their entire heads in the water.

One turkey seemed stuck. He couldn't decide if he wanted to join the others, or remain alone on the bench. He strutted back and forth uncomfortably, ruffled his feathers, and clucked nervously. Eventually, he hopped off of the bench, tentatively approached the water, and submerged his beak.

Then he jumped completely into the pool and began walking around.

The woman and I looked at each other again. We smiled.

Ten minutes passed. Everyone remained silent. Their drinking complete, the turkeys withdrew from the water to make the short flight onto the bench. The last one, however, was reluctant. While the others were now standing on the edge of the bench, waiting to jump down to the hillside, he was still in the water, still walking, still drinking. One turkey strutted back towards the straggler, shook his wings, and gobbled. The straggler sat down. The other turkey gobbled again. The straggler reluctantly hopped out of the pool and walked towards the bench. Then he stopped, turned around, and returned for another drink. The others paced back and forth, pausing periodically to peer over the edge towards the hillside. After his drink, the straggler again approached the bench, paused, and returned to the water.

This went on for five minutes, and by the time the whole group re-convened atop the bench, the others had grown impatient, punctuating their annoyance with feather-ruffling and troubled pacing. Nonetheless, they began to dismount. From my vantage point, watching each bird depart was like viewing a diver from the surface of a diving board. Although I knew there was a hillside a mere 18' under their outstretched feet, all I could see beyond the bench were blue sky and distant trees.

The first bird jumped and disappeared completely.

The others followed, and with each leap it became harder to suppress my laughter. It was *funny* to see them leap into nothingness. There. *Poo!!* Gone. I averted my eyes, clenched my teeth, and even pinched my leg to avoid breaking my vow of silence. I glanced toward the woman. She was struggling just the same. Others were as well.

After four jumps it was the straggler's turn. He paced back and forth, fluttered his wings. He clucked in a low, concerned manner. Several times he paused, peered over the edge, and retreated. We all knew he knew that the rest of the group was just a few feet away, scratching at the ground as they wandered down the hillside. But for the poor straggler, this open space seemed insurmountable.

I leaned forward, watching intently. The straggler continued to gobble, fret, and pace. Around me, nearly two-dozen people remained in rapt attention. What would he do? Was he ever going to jump? It was almost time for meditation. *Come on, man!*

As he cautiously approached the edge for the fourth time, the straggler peered over, and squatted low. At last, he was ready. But not to jump. Instead, he let out a thick white and gray stream of shit, a small waterfall that settled into a cookie-sized liquid pile directly behind his legs.

Our silence broke, profoundly. All around me, people covered their mouths and tried to swallow their laughter. Some slumped over, held their knees, and rocked back and forth. I slouched against the planter box in a state of mock surrender. Unable to refrain, I burst, exhaling deep laughter, briefly losing sense of place, time, or thought. I simply laughed, and laughed, and thenÉcried. Not muchÑjust a few tears from tired eyesÑbut enough to acknowledge that I also knew that edge, that empty blue sky, that fear of leaping into an abyss.

The meditation bell rang.

As I rose, that last turkey finally glided over the edge, as if coaxed by the deep rhythmic tones now cascading through the air. The bench was empty. I stretched my hands skyward and caught sight of the five birds, now halfway down the hill. Four of them were bunched closely together, pecking at the ground. The fifth lagged behind, ruffling his feathers. I turned and joined the stream of people walking into the meditation hall.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Chris Malcomb

Chris Malcomb's essays have appeared in *The San Francisco Chronicle Magazine*, *Teachers & Writers*, *Common Ground*, and *The Sun*. He currently teaches Mindfulness & Creative Writing workshops in Berkeley, CA.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

The Third Jewel
Nonfiction

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submissions](#)

[contributors](#)

[submission information](#)

[staff](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[issues](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

http://swback.com/issues/011/bios/Chris_Malcomb.html[7/10/20, 9:29:40 PM]

bubbles that children blow.

We settle on our pelvises in the red mud and root for our side.

Portrait of a Young Marine

In the photo you flex your biceps, your green utility jacket ragged, long sleeves rolled to better expose the ropey muscles. You sport a child's mustache, not a man's. More like a thin red mud stain than a russet tinted caterpillar. You might nod to yourself, that would be good, a mustache as thick as a caterpillar. But we have no butterflies in this memory. We killed them all, and the shattered trees that look like jagged leg bones, one end jabbed into the wet red turf. Your weapon, though, shines black. You kept it clean and able. The bayonet honed to a microscopic line. The magazines stuffed with brass and steel. The tips of bullets carved by K-bar blade, a cross across the top. A message to the hated ones you pray will sprawl mug-up in the mud, their sallow skin the color of paper your wife's letters arrive on. Old paper.

Waiting to engage them, we claim to have fornicated many girls. The lies we spin lead to hidden sniggers and grim smiles. We tell filthy jokes about horny women. We laugh and slap our dirty thighs at the mention of death and strut below the lip of the trench, dare death to come calling, careful not to jab our helmeted heads above the moldy sandbagged parapet. Once you stood tall, unaware that you would fit in sandbag crannies, like an insect, in cracks, and shiver beneath clods of blood red mud.

Uncle Wiggly

The jungle is a repository of life we can't understand. Spiders black and red and yellow as big as your hand. Snakes with heads like nuns' wimples which bring no solace. Leather skinned salt crocs that hide in the edges of the rivers we cross. Striped cats that eat us. They weigh a quarter of a ton and sneak through the bamboo thickets below the hives that hold the bees that hold a lot of malice if you mess with their house. Ask Richardson, he cut one with a machete and ended up swollen like a bloated toad, his face with knots and knuckles. He lived to fight another day but hopefully a wiser warrior. Attack only what you need to kill. Kill only what you need to kill.

Ask Uncle Wiggly. Ask him about getting stoned in the back of a Huey and shooting elephants with a fifty caliber out the door as the chopper flew over the eons of trees that stalled our progress. *Pomp pomp pomp*. The weapon report caught in the wind and hauled off to Hanoi with the dead leaves of autumn. The elephant finally succumbing and I mean finally, its knees stuffed in the mud. Its young trumpeting a lost sorrow caught in the gale of the chopper blades. Ask Uncle Wiggly about getting stoned in the back of a chopper and burning up the barrel of his fifty caliber machine gun, his lover, his gun. Ask him about red hot tracer rounds gone astray, scratching art through the canopy like lost little waifs in Danang. Ask him.

At the Reunion

We proud old men riding high in our wheel chairs
gray hair thinning
or is it the years

Once we marched in step
M-16s right shoulder arms
M-79 40MM grenade launchers
Our spit shined boot heels
thumping the grinder
the skin of the earth
six thousand strong
as if we were one
thump thump thump

We busted our lungs
and our muscled guts
in the lyrics of our battle hymns
our Montezuma's Halls
our Tripoli Shores

We hunkered in our bunkers
and waited for the conclusion
the hot metal
the hot scent of blood
and for those of us still standing
it did not greet us face to face
but hovered over our shoulders
those terrible years
the swish of the wings
like memories that keen
their sad old killer's anthem

But here
the gray haired
chubby guts and cheeks
one-legged
reminisce and lie
or maybe we don't lie
we just don't remember

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Immaculate

Wendy Sumner-Winter

I stood in the Goodwill parking lot on the Highland Strip, across the street from the college bars. Music billowed out with the cigarette smoke as kids my age pushed and pulled their way into and out of the darkness. I smoothed the pale blue dress across my torso, imagining the cells blooming inside of me. The dress was an extra extra large tent-like thing, taken from the left-behind-pile at the dry cleaner where I worked. I arched my back and stretched the fabric across the convex curve of my belly.

I don't know why I was standing there. Perhaps I was stalking, waiting to be stumbled upon. Waiting for one of the boys to come and claim me, to take responsibility. I was standing there, and it seems to me that it was cool, late spring.

But my chronology about this whole time in my life is fucked up. When I look back, I don't know what happened first, what thing led to or came from the other. I'd waited a long time to become a woman, to know men. And then off to the races. I'd run out of the starting gate like that mechanical rabbit would feed me if only I could catch it.

And then I was in the emergency room. In the waiting area of the grimy public hospital, the hospital for the indigent and shattered. My father's friend, an older man, a Christian, having pity on me in my state, sat beside me. I don't remember the labor beginning, or how it was that I came to be in this place with my father's friend. He prayed for me, but I kept my eyes open, could not bow my head, could not say amen. So be it.

I could not lower myself fully onto the chair. I could not let my legs stick to the ripped black vinyl upholstery. I did not want to let the blood go, fearing what it would take with it.

The nurses nodded toward the chairs every time I went to ask how long? as if they'd seen a million girls pushing a million dead babies into the world, into this dark room. I was afraid to push them, afraid of being shuffled to the bottom of the pile of files. So, I waited my turn.

When my turn came, I'd already finished.

They spread the white paper across the brown vinyl table. I tried to stay on the paper, away from the blood that was on the floor, on the garbage can, on the step I took to crawl up. They spread my legs and nodded, reaching inside of me, confirming what I already knew. I was empty.

I lay there with tears dripping, as quietly as I could; afraid to ask for reprieve from my sins, afraid to ask for relief from

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

The Third Jewel

Chris Malcomb

On War and Remembrance

Ken Rodgers

Immaculate

Wendy Sumner-Winter

Spectacles of the Mind

Manda Frederick

Poetry

Fiction

Art

http://swback.com/issues/011/immaculate.html[7/10/20, 9:30:35 PM]

my consequences.



The room was filled with people. People in addition to the nurses and doctors. A party bopped around like this was something easy, something not deserving of solemnity, reverence. All watching my sister push her second child into the world. At twenty-two, she had two. At twenty-nine, I had none.

This baby was born blue.

I sat at the foot of the gurney and wondered why no one else seemed to notice that the baby was dead. The nurses scurried around, each with a task that made them not see her. The party filmed and laughed, patted each other on the back as if they'd done something. As if, by their universal virility, they had done something here with my sister.

The blue baby had black, black hair and lots of it. Her face was screwed up in a scowl as if a scream were trying to escape from the black gulf of her throat. The room was cold. I looked at my fingertips. They were blue as well.

My sister's red face popped up from her pillow as she pulled her knees toward her chest. She grunted and howled, her hair a wet halo against the starched white pillow. I could not move, but waited for her eyes to open and see the blue baby slithering into the world. She did not look.

They held a mirror between her legs and she looked. She reached down to touch the head which had paused in the entryway, the exit. Wow, wow, wow. She said it over and over, an ohm, a birthing chant.

The baby finally screamed, and took a deep breath. The baby punched at the air as she lay on her mother's stomach.

I stood as the nurse carried the baby's pink and squalling body to the scale. I reached for her, and touched the tip of the swaddled form as they lay her in the crook of my sister's arm Ð out of my arms Ð reach.



They lopped off the ends of my fallopian tubes, over and over until there was no point in keeping the scraps anymore. The ovaries were pocked with cysts and covered in webs of scars. Blood ran for years without pause. Two more babies exited dead.

I gave up, resigned, and had them take it all away.

In the ward they wrapped my legs with pressure cuffs and gave me the morphine button. I pushed on a timer Ð every ten minutes. I willed myself to be relieved, to feel emancipated, to no avail. They said to walk, walk it off, like what you tell a kid on the playground who's been punched in the stomach. I walked and wept and watched my lover try to reach me, to keep up with the sorrow, to sweep it away.

Consolation cards came with casseroles and insufficient comfort. I was in a place unreachable by platitudes and promises of better days. The good aunt, the cheerful sitter, the unperturbed marriage Ð such prognostications are the luxury of the full.

The priest said to my friends, Father, name your child. I wept onto my lap, holding the keen in my throat, keeping my silence. We bowed our heads as the parents passed, down the aisle, the font behind them. And then we stopped going at all, too many overflowing cradles, too much predestination.

Time does not heal the want.



When I first heard that she’d come into the world, she was already six weeks old. Already sliced and diced, already neglected. She was sick, they told us. She was broken, they said. They offered her to us as if they had the right to broker her. It was all hypothetical, all horror.

We stood in our kitchen, on opposite sides of the silver table, four hundred miles away from her, looking at each other. I with longing, he with reserve. I wanted a baby. He didn’t. Neither want nor lack of want mattered. She belonged to someone else.

I saw her first at nine months, crawling on the filthy floor, dragging her feeding tube behind her. Dragging it through the dog hair, against the flea filled carpet. I saw the green mucous crusting her unfiltered trach. I saw her mouth stretch wide in a silent howl. I saw her red hair, thin and patchy like a chemo patient’s, her skinny legs, her distended tummy. And I saw her mother’s dispassion, disconnection. It was everything I could do to not reach out, grab her, and run.

When we got in the car, I told him that this, this baby, was my baby.



Another year, another phone call, standing in the same place, the silver table reflecting our faces. He looks at me and mouths, it’s the baby. I see the switch in him, instant, firm. He is a father now. I know, that moment, like I knew from the very first moment. My baby is coming home.

We have five weeks between the phone call and the arrival. A short gestation. We walk around in a daze, pregnant with fear and sorrow and joy, not sure where to go first, what to do. We read about the causes, the missteps, the brokenness, the system. We learn new words, forget old dreams. Adjust to the coming.

People are happy for us. They throw thoughtful showers for us, and thoughtless phrases at us. Jewels in your crowns. She’s lucky to have you. Things happen for a reason. Meant to be. Meant to be? People tell me that; I sometimes think it. But that would mean her suffering was meant to be, engineered. That can’t be, isn’t, true. My suffering, the availability of my home and heart to her, not meant to be. I don’t buy it.

I think about the first mother, my husband’s sister, young and numb, like I was once. I gin up compassion like a white lie. I look so hard at the facts that have been laid out before me in the documents. Highlighted in yellow. Arrived at school with wet feet in forty-degree weather . . . child found lying in a pool of vomit, choking, alarms ringing, door closed . . . social worker called to spend the night in ICU because mother’s first day of school is tomorrow. How does one forgive?

I lie awake most nights, watching her breathe, waiting for her to stop. And when I sleep, I labor. Pain beats at my insides, from my mind?, from my own sense of loss?, the scars of my un-birthed babies crying for their new sister? And when I wake again, my breasts tingle from the phantom suckling, ache for the baby to be nourished from my body. I examine my sheets for the blood, the placenta, the water. The sheets are immaculate.

I want to hear the word mama, but she is silent, eyes averted, tentative. It’s too soon, but I am impatient. We trip over the event horizon and into a black hole, a tiny spot of receding space. Sorrow and anger are sublimated by the need to move, move, move. We are making up for lost time. We are trying to restore what she never had in the first place. We try to replace what should have always been hers, but never was.

I check her feeding tube; fill the bag with putrid-smelling formula. I hold her tight to my breast as she vomits up every bit of life that I can imagine she holds inside of her. I wrestle against her swatting hands, touching her where she cannot bear to be touched. I hold her down, slide the trach out of its puckered hole. Her mouth stretches open, gasping for air, the instinct that has no satisfaction. Her eyes widen as I slide the fresh one in. I give her back her breath.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Switchback

Spectacles of the Mind

[Manda Frederick](#)

Elle sits across from me at my metal yellow desk. Tiredness cuts away from her tear ducts in two bruise-colored wedges. Lately, in lieu of her usual intellectual-meets-bohemian-coordinated outfits, she’s been wearing sweats to class. Her eyes are as red as the flush of her cheeks, and the greens of her irises are electric against her pinked whites. You look tired, I say. She doesn’t respond, but her body tenses into itself.

Elle is quiet. She glances at my two officemates’ fellow graduate students. This room isn’t big enough for three desks and four people, and we’re practically touching elbows. She asked to meet me in my office after class to talk about this week’s assignment, the personal essay. I didn’t think this was unusual; several of my students were anxious about this particular assignment and had met with me. Earlier this week, I had condemned conventional composition writing devices and thesis statements to my students, quoting some source on how such methods only limited their creative possibilities and closed their minds. I had explained that the purpose of an essay is to think through an issue. I offered them a detailed prompt with inspiring quotes (read: inexperienced graduate student trying to look like a knowledgeable writing teacher):

The “essay is the closest thing we have, on paper, to a record of the individual mind at work and play—the spectacle of a single consciousness making sense of part of the chaos.”

—Scott Russell Sanders

The “genuine essayist is the writer who thinks his way though the essay” and so comes out where perhaps he did not wish to.

—Alfred Kazin

The essay “is the mind in the marvels and miseries of its makings.”

—William H. Gass

When I gave my students the personal essay assignment and told them to abandon thesis statements, I also urged them to pick a personal experience they hadn’t quite “figured out yet.” This ruled out already-told stories and already-journaled experiences. The other writing assignments, I explained, are product-driven: the department is trying to get you to demonstrate that you’ve learned something taught *to* you. The personal essay, I reminded my students, is process-based: we’re trying to get you to learn something *from* or *about* yourself. And though there was no way to enforce such a demand, some of the students embraced the encouragement and struggled through their own unexamined experiences. Elle is one of these students.

A perfectionist, Elle is hard on herself. She’s the kind of student I must sometimes pull aside and tell to take it easy on an assignment, that her idea of a “C”-grade effort is equivalent to most people’s idea of an “A.”

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Page 1 of 2 >>

Nonfiction

The Third Jewel

Chris Malcomb

On War and Remembrance

Ken Rodgers

Immaculate

Wendy Summer-Winter

Spectacles of the Mind

Manda Frederick

Poetry

Fiction

Art

http://swback.com/issues/011/spectacles-mind/1.html[7/10/20, 9:30:59 PM]

effort; often, she'll either turn in her idea of an "effort" assignment or not turn anything in at all. So, now, I suspect she is meeting with me to ask for an extension.

Ellie seems to have forgotten my office mates and, now, is only thinking. She absent-mindedly taps her index finger a few times on my desk, like she's striking a piano key—she does this sometimes, in class, before she offers something to the discussion that she's not confident about saying. Recognizing her hesitation, I turn toward her fully, adjusting so that I'm seated Indian-style in my seat (read: writing teacher trying to look more like an approachable graduate student). And in my most casual, cheerful tone, I give her the go ahead with a "So what's up?"

Ellie tells me that she's interested in the personal essay as a way to work through an experience. She says wants to write about "what happened" when she was eleven. She thinks she's ready. But she's having a really hard time "figuring it out."

I tell her it, whatever it is, sounds like a good candidate for a personal essay.

"Only a couple people aside from my parents know about it," she says. "I never talk about it, or think about it either, really."

"So what happened?" I ask.

"My parents were going through a divorce."

Oh, is that it? I think.

She felt alone. She fell in love with an equally lonely boy, also eleven.

"Were his parents getting a divorce, too?" I ask.

"No," she says. "He was dying of cancer."

That's sad, I think. "That's sad," I say. Did he die? I wonder. "So you want to write about his cancer?" I ask.

"Not exactly," she says. "See, he used to keep a needle, you know, the kind that you get shots with, in the spine of a book. He said if anything ever got too hard, he'd put the needle into his arm and let air into his vein and he'd die."

"Does that really work?" I say without thinking.

Ellie nods. "It sends air to your heart and you die," she confirms. She didn't think it would work either. Until he did it. And he died.

Where do kids learn this stuff? I think. "So that's 'what happened' when you were eleven?" I ask.

"That's what you want to write about?"

"Not exactly," she says. "That's what made me do *it*."

Ellie stops talking. There is a long, quiet minute between us. I want to ask her a nudging question, but decide to wait to see what she needs from me because I'm not entirely sure. As a teacher of writing, I'm a novice. This is my first quarter teaching and I've struggled with learning the boundaries between "teacher" and "human being" in the classroom; I've struggled in developing my curriculum so that it meets the department requirements and my own goals as a teacher and writer. When establishing your first writing curriculum, the department for which you work will probably encourage you to establish a steadfast list of course objectives: broad goals that the students will achieve by the end of the term. You must ask yourself: what can't the students do now that they should be able to do at the end of the quarter, and how will you achieve this? But it's hard to know what the students can't do. It's presumptuous to assume what the students can't do. So I found myself projecting on my students my own self-judgment of what I couldn't do when I was their age: I had a hard time thinking about the world and making sense of my experiences. I wasn't sure how this could relate to composition. But I knew this: I loved writing. I wanted them to love writing. So when I discovered that the department for which I work required

three major assignments—the expository paper, the argument paper, and the personal essay—I knew, instantly, that I would use the personal essay to teach my students something important: to use writing to think about the world and make sense of their experiences. This is what Ellie is trying to do.

Ellie starts tapping her fingers on my desk, again. I know this is a comforting cadence for her—the repetitious soothing we all must have learned from the heart. Her eyes are so green, now, and I'm sure she's going to cry.

Finally, she asks: "Have you ever had your stomach pumped?"



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [staff](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [issues](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Switchback

Spectacles of the Mind

Manda Frederick

I'm startled by her question. I'm often startled by my students, especially lately, because of the revealing nature of the personal essay assignment. The truth is, even though I'm glad to have the chance to teach it to my students, I've always questioned the place of the personal essay in an academic environment.

When French Renaissance writer Michel Montaigne lost his closest friend—a friend with whom he'd exchanged scores of letters—Montaigne, the fountainhead of the personal essay, began writing self-examining works about the world sifted through his own lens, his own judgment to an imagined audience. He wrote to no one and everyone all at once in an attempt to compensate for the loss of his friend, the loss of an understanding mind with which to share ideas. So the success of these essays rests on an important assumption: “Every man has, within himself, the entire human condition.” In modern times, a personal essayist—that is, a writer who follows Montaigne's example and sets out to examine herself and her experiences through the essay—has an *idea* of what she's getting herself into; an essayist knowingly engages in the difficult task of confronting herself on the page. For this reason, I should have known better than to assign such a thing to my novice students. An essayist knows she's pitting her *own judgments* against the world. By tossing herself head-first into the realm of general human understanding, she knows what she's after: to learn something about herself, from herself, before she hits the bottom.

But the “essay” in an academic setting is a different sort of thing. An essay as an assignment presumes that the audience is not imagined, but is the teacher—the figure that taught the student what she knows. The student pits her ideas against the *teacher's* judgment. The student acts on the assumption that we are all taught through our academic careers: that every student has, within herself, the ability to succeed by doing what is asked of her and demonstrating she has been taught something. I realize this is why my students are having such a hard time with the task of writing a personal essay: I'm asking them to do an entirely different thing than they have had to do. And, for some of them, the impacts after their head-long leaps are hard. I am sitting across from Ellie as I watch her tumble down into herself—and I really have no idea what to do. This is not the kind of thing I had expected my assignment to prompt.

Ellie had asked me if I'd ever had my stomach pumped in a hopeful tone, like maybe I'll say yes, as though she asked me if I like Indian food, and if I do say yes, maybe we could go somewhere, sometime, and eat it together.

But I can't say, I have, in fact, had my stomach pumped. I can only imagine it: a probing tube fed through her self-loathing throat toward the stomach, the esophagus softly hugging it. The tube wrestles bile away from the belly. The stomach is a clenched mouth under the rib cage as it tightens with every pump, as a machine attempts to swallow what has already been swallowed. I open my mouth and almost tell her that I swallowed my own pills when I was the age she is now. But I close my mouth because I would be embarrassed to tell her that I threw them up. The pills were hardy and my stomach was not. But Ellie's stomach was strong. Her stomach was strong when her eleven-year-old body was weak as she shuddered against bathroom tile wailing for a classmate, her first

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

<< Page 2 of 2

Nonfiction

The Third Jewel

Chris Malcomb

On War and Remembrance

Ken Rodgers

Immaculate

Wendy Summer-Winter

Spectacles of the Mind

Manda Frederick

Poetry

Fiction

Art

http://swback.com/issues/011/spectacles-mind/2.html[7/10/20, 11:04:22 PM]

boyfriend, who committed suicide. Tiles crossed beneath her as sharply as the circumstances that brought her to that point. At the point of what Ellie called her lonely junction. But Ellie didn't ask me if I swallowed my own prescription. She asked me if I'd ever had my stomach pumped. So I say, "No."

I regret encouraging Ellie to think through this issue because I arrived somewhere, as a teacher, perhaps, that I didn't wish to. I regret prompting her to showcase her mind in its marvels and, in this case, its miseries. I don't want her to make a spectacle of her consciousness making sense of its own chaos. A spectacle, which, I have no right as her composition instructor to witness. The personal essay is a personal experience for a reason.

I want to squeeze her close to me and tell her, I know, Ellie. Believe me, I know. I know you are tired and over-extended by no fault but your own. I know you generally look great outside, but you feel terrible inside and this utter exhaustion is why you quit showering this week; maybe someone will notice you are, in every sense, a crumpled mess, even though you'd rather be caught dead than be seen in public like this, because right now, you'd rather be caught dead than any other way. As her teacher, I don't think that saying this is an appropriate thing to do. I am, while I sit across from her, in the process of our meeting, trying to learn what to do. Teaching the personal essay is a lot like writing the personal essay, it seems. I've been trying to get my students to learn something from or about themselves; I wasn't expecting to do the same.

The personal essay, to me, is a standing invitation to get serious with yourself and your experiences, which is a very hard thing to do. None of the hardest things I've personally ever done. An invitation you could accept when you were ready, and if you were never ready, so be it. An invitation I had made, clumsily, as a first-time teacher, mandatory to twenty-five of my students because it is thought, in composition pedagogy, that the personal essay gives students a chance to "simply" write about themselves. The personal essay is supposed to be an "easy" way for students to get writing so that they can transition into the "serious" papers. But it isn't simple, actually. It isn't easy.

When you realize you've made a mistake that affects a lot of other people, you might feel panic and embarrassment, which is precisely how I feel sitting in front of my red-faced eighteen-year-old student who is taking this course only as a required step toward a degree in biology. From Ellie, I got exactly what I had asked for. It was supposed to be difficult for her, but it wasn't supposed to be this hard.

But like an invitation that's already been extended, I couldn't take it back.

And, anyway, this is what I'd been pushing my students to do all quarter. And when I didn't think my encouragement was strong enough to shove them over the edge of "safe" writing, I used other, more substantial voices to make the message loud and clear. For instance, I had the students read a short segment of writing from Annie Dillard, who urges writers: "Push it. Examine all things intensely and relentlessly...do not leave it, do not course over it, as if it were understood, but instead follow it down until you see it in the mystery of its specificity and strength." And that's exactly what Ellie has done, following this thing all the way down until she almost can't stand it. And I admire her right now, not as an instructor who might admire a student who has done a good job, but as a writer and a human being trying to make sense of things. Mostly, I admire her for doing what I try so very hard to do in my own writing: she's facing the big issues in her life. And unlike me (and many other essayists I know), she is even confronting her own confusion about the whole mess by meeting with me to try to resolve it, whereas I would have abandoned the essay altogether, for no reason other than this: it is easier to quit writing than it is to keep thinking. But you must keep thinking.

And Ellie must keep thinking. But, still, I have no idea what to say to her. She's in the thick of this process, and I don't feel it's right to bring her back or push her forward. So I do what teachers do: I ask her teacherly questions about her introduction and conclusion; I tell her to double check her transitions when she's done; I remind her not to over use semi-colons like she sometimes does. I, again, support her choice of topic and tell her if

she wants me to review her rough draft that she can e-mail it to me. But as she's heading out, I feel I should say something more. So I do what fellow-essayists do, what friends do: I say that it's okay if writing her essay is scary. It'll be good to get it down, I say. I point out that in Dillard's short segment on writing, she supports her argument that, even if it is difficult, the world *must* be examined deeply. Dillard gives us a reminder, an encouragement: she says you must "admire the world for never ending on you." And, even if you think it might, the world really doesn't end on you.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

birds who eat flowers

ali lanzetta

concrete noun proper noun me to pieces : out the window past halfway shades birds circle where megan says
Òavenues of doom / spirit of she isolated in timeÓ : form is the form is the form is how it sits on the page : sick with
the furniture / spicer waiting in the parlor without dinner for days : levels of texture : textured birds on the wind :
close to the ocean you can feel it in the fog : i lift things because how can i not : what to do watching the birds
want to cross things off the list : add another new at the bottom : Òi love a red windowÓ : poems as petals that fall
off : i want to be delayed / i want to eat paragraphs / i want to be eaten by birds

SHARE

...

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers

ali lanzetta

Ars Botanica

Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy

Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom

Chris Carosi

The Missing Person

Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday

Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening

Adam Strauss

The Story

Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford

Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)

Cedar Sigo

Vinculum

Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

December 33

Jami Proctor-Xu

http://swback.com/issues/011/birds-who-eat-flowers.html

[7/10/20, 9:31:24 PM]

ali lanzetta

ali lanzetta is a linguistic, visual and musical artist, living in San Francisco. She holds a BA in Studio Art, an MA in English, and is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing, at San Francisco State University. ali's work has appeared in *Transfer*, *Hunger Mountain* and *Verse*, and her writing, music and book art have been featured at various creative venues around the city. ali was born with the sun in Scorpio. she is enamored with giraffes, whose hearts are over two feet long. to read more of ali's work, please visit her online writing space, [makeshift whimsy](#).

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

[home](#) [contributors](#) [staff](#) [issues](#) [comments](#) [links](#)
[**submission information**](#) [**email the webmaster**](#) [**email comments to the editors**](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

We should wonder if ivy tastes
its victims: Have botanists considered

what it would mean if photosynthesis
is not the real reason ivy spreads?

Sometimes human proliferation
is purely accidental: a broken condom,
drunk dialing, uninvited sexual encounters.

The only way to rid your garden of ivy
is to eliminate the mother root. Tools
must be properly coded so that they

don't get lost in the process.

You may need the following:
loppers, pruning shears,
a saw, a shovel, trowels.

I once touched a Chagall
at a museum.

Nobody was looking.

And it wasn't his greatest work.

My fingerprint remains at the bottom
corner—just next to
a blue horse.

Many naturalists hate ivy.
It plagues indigenous flora
and sucks life from endangered trees.

Though it shelters many
animal species, it compromises
the homes of others like
the endangered elderberry beetle.

They will chop it, lop it, dig it up, shred it,
and even set fire to it. Still

it returns after each rainy season
to tether and leech stands
of cottonwoods and madrones.



THE MOOR DANCES
Mark Boccard

Fiction

Art

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Katharyn M. Browne

Katharyn M. Browne lives, reads, and writes in the Bay Area. She is currently finishing her MFA at USF.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Ars Botanica

Poetry

Vinculum

Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[contributors](#)

[submission information](#)

[staff](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[issues](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

http://swback.com/issues/011/bios/Katharyn_M_Browne.html[7/10/20, 9:32:00 PM]

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

The B-Boy

Martha Grover

The best of them,
a jazz scatter,
a solo of sung limbs
in the haloed gym lights.
And the worst,
a joyful dribbling stutter,
still forgivable -
a one-sided wrestle
with weight and drum.

Top Rock and Suicide,
Power-move and Electric Slide,
Battle Hymns and Freeze -
shorthand for bodies
flaming through space.

These were battles fought macho-baroque
by pubescents, boys,
thinned by bravado
and a winnowing gravity.

And I fell for it all,
the throw-down, the stance,

the ante B its upping.

SHARE

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers
ali lanzetta

Ars Botanica
Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy
Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom
Chris Carosi

The Missing Person
Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday
Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet
Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33
Jami Proctor-Xu

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

The Lonely Freedom

Chris Carosi

How do you love the night correctly?
Just one potion does it, one gentle
parachute in the throat, made
of the heart's curtains. Old core,
curved blade bosom. Slice us
right. Stored it. Wrote it. Believed
it. And fell, invulnerable, onto
a wounded floor. God.
The hill country. The mountain
country. All nervous of life.
All must tell. What good is breath?
If no others appear I will tell
myself. There are dogs
sniffing and trying to find
their old yard. The bluish train
car sits like a rock on the horizon,
to build up the tomb. Stand
in the doorway, and commit
treason. God. Now hand me
your shoes and let's go running
through the corn that is never ours.

Round up the crow feathers we find
and force them onto the cool breezes.
Love the rain and fatigue from the rain,
our naked feet bearing in the mud, the
rain boils in the puddles. Suns in the rain
behind the rain. God. How does
a pen begin what to say when our motive
sits on its end bleeding whole earths.
This miracle is not simple. It tries
no word. I wonder for a thousand
years as I kiss you, and pronounce
this feeling into tambourines. You
are not a fool with me to believe
because belief is fundamental.
Rise into my throat, outrageous
blood, stutter as you attempt speech.

Do not be mystic. Do not hold back.
Do not be afraid to adorn your voice.
Do not pursue thrills. Search
for the poor king, the heels of the soldier
staring into the burial pit. Reach
your arms toward the wind
while it streaks past your eyes,
drawing water from your eyes,
You have been there.

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers

all lanzetta

Ars Botanica

Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy

Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom

Chris Carosi

The Missing Person

Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday

Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening

Adam Strauss

The Story

Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford

Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)

Cedar Sigo

Vinculum

Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

December 33

Jami Proctor-Xu

SHARE

http://swback.com/issues/011/lonely-freedom.html[7/10/20, 9:32:48 PM]

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Chris Carosi

Chris Carosi is from Pittsburgh. He is currently studying at the University of San Francisco for an MFA degree in Poetry. He would like to dedicate "The Lonely Freedom" to his classmates and teachers.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

The Lonely Freedom
Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submissions](#)

[contributors](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[staff](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[issues](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

http://swback.com/issues/011/bios/Chris_Carosi_.html[7/10/20, 9:32:57 PM]

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

The Missing Person

Maureen Alsop

You came covered in rain. Arrival was not yours to choose and least efficient was your bleak trail. Stars rang with traces of snow. Sleep walked out of your shadow. You sat in the doorway. Somehow I let you linger. Somehow I had welcomed you in from the quiet edges of the fern. The air was your house and your farm and your garden. Horses blessed the orchard. But you were no wanderer. The pale buttons on your felt hat, the simple sheep with their gold eyes, the scuff of the sea along your collar named you. You were maiden, my waking, magnolia blossoms flame across the river. Once you, who had never been there, witnessed the words outside your voice. The passage of your long music, the flood of sunlight as it bronzed my throat.

SHARE

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers

ali lanzetta

Ars Botanica

Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy

Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom

Chris Carosi

The Missing Person

Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday

Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening

Adam Strauss

The Story

Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford

Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)

Cedar Sigo

Vinculum

Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

December 33

Jami Proctor-Xu

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Maureen Alsop

Maureen Alsop is the author of two full collections of poetry, *Apparition Wren* (Main Street Rag) and *The Diction of Moths* (Ghost Road Press, pending). She is also the author of several chapbooks, most recently *Luminal Equation* in the collection *Narwhal* (Cannibal Press), *the dream and the dream you spoke* (Spire Press). She is the winner of *Harpur Palate's* Milton Kessler Memorial Prize for Poetry and *The Bitter Oleander's* Frances Locke Memorial Poetry Award. Her more recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in various journals including *Blackbird*, *AGNI*, *Tampa Review*, *Action Yes*, *Pank*, *Whiskey Island*, *qartsiluni*, *42 Opus*, and *Drunken Boat*.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

The Missing Person

Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submision information](#)

[contributors](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[staff](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[issues](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

homeissuescontributorssubmissionsstaffcommentsvideolinks

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday

[Eric Rawson](#)

If I have sinned the rain falls more blackly
On the corn fields\the river crests and floods

And the sparrow tucks under a wet wing
I must have believed it once when I came
Here to be hidden behind the treatment

Plant before the dealerships bought up all
The bottomland except this far corner

Even wet the acorns clack as they fall

From the yellow branches to the pavement
Stained with the tannins of half a century
Maybe more some shed some crib or storehouse

Stood here sheltering equipment records
Against the horde of winter sweeping down
From Canada\and there\ the rusted ruin

Of the old car a Chevrolet I think
Though it\’s hard to see under the sumac
And huckleberries and saplings pushing

Through the rotted seats and sticking out through

The broken windows\what a mess of blood-
Root and cockleburrs\I kick through it

Crunching acorns looking for the old marks

I drag my bag of sins behind me pale
Ones the rotten crabs and dark ones the burned

Wings heavy heavier every year\
But I\’m too selfish to give them away
The little dears and the scary mothers

Drag my bag through the city where I live

Picking up sins at the farmers\ market
Where I trample the sour disgusting old

Women licking the radishes picking
Up sins on the boulevard as I crack
The skinny fingers held out for a buck

Gathering sins while I\’m rolling on the floor
Of the Largo chewing the waitresses\

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers
ali lanzetta

Ars Botanica
Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy
Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom
Chris Carosi

The Missing Person
Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday
Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet
Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening\I
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33
Jami Proctor-Xu

Skirts like a dog
toss them all in my bag

And stagger on through the beautiful world
Leaving a trail of black oil behind me

I
m lazy lazy all day and the next

I
Ove hardly shaken off the night
O's dander
Before it
O's time to lean into the arms
Of afternoon
the years have hung the weight

Of luxury on me
I can
O't bear it
Here I am trying to live again with-

Out all the fat all the cheesy richness
O stupid youth rooted in the wind
I

Know now why I sat on those hard pews when
All I believed in was sliced beef on rye
And a girl
O's new hips flaring in the grass

And I know now why I went the long way

Through snow or stood in the rain on the steps
Of the library for hours I know why

My head ached with algebra and why I
Hungered for the sight of ice-hung branches
But refused to let my dreams inform me
I

There
O's hardly anyone alive today
Who remembers the wide use of manure

The smell of it on the fields or the smell
Of dung in the towns who knows what coffee
Smelled like at Wilshire & Vermont at eight

O
O'clock in the morning one-hundred years

Ago
I hardly anyone remembers
The smell of the canvas tabernacles
Or fresh sawdust on floors and what about

The smell of kerosene which no one knows
Anymore and the smell of castile soap

The smell of the Bronze Age the goats and figs
Or the smell of Gettysburg with its ten
Thousand rotting horses and smoking trees

There
O's no one alive who knows the smell of

Teepees by the Mississippi River
And no one who knows the smell of my own

History except me
I the smell of the bed
The smell beneath the juniper the smell
Of pears of frog-water the smell inside

A trombone case and of the gray paint on
The bleachers the smell of wet newspaper

That belongs to only one life among
The many and keeps the gate of memory

THE MOOR DANCES
Mark Boccard

Fiction

Art

Open the smell of the first day of it

Of a ditch of a wet red dog the mud

Kneeling knees soaked ankles soaked hair dripping
 I shake with the cold but not only that

Out here in the weeds in the greasy rain
 Out here in the presbyterian autumn
 Pouring down its dark flumes of clouds and flocks

Of migratory fowl
 let the wind blow through

My bones and hollow me out like a shell
 Tear down my pride and hide me in the grave

Of your love dear God
 I don't want to live
 Another day without your fingers wrapped
 Around my heart
 save me from history

The fat-lipped ghost is resting his head on
 My shoulder and muttering in my ear
 He's squeezing my neck and poking my ribs

With his big hands
 he keeps insisting that
 I understand about acorns
 he thinks

There is a lesson listen he mutters
 I know you don't like me
 he spits it out
 I don't like you
 you don't have to like me

To learn to serve to let a squirrel plant

You in the cold muck to be a kernel
 Cut from the tree
 you don't have to like it

But I'm going to spit into your ear
 you
 Will be yourself in giving everything

To the world
 it does not matter that you
 Lose your goddamn sins
 you know this is true

Over the dealerships the floodlights bloom

Whitely and a tractor-trailer gears up

The incline on the highway into town
 All across the Midwest the sober psalm
 Of October repeats in the mouths of

Crows and the whispering grass winter
 Has begun draining the blood from the land



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Inflection or innuendo, imply or infer,
Wallace Stevens does not know
which beauty he might prefer.

I could not say for sure
but I think him disingenuous
to put the choice as either/or,

for neither one exists
without the other there

no blackbird whistles
without an open ear.

SHARE

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers
ali lanzetta

Ars Botanica
Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy
Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom
Chris Carosi

The Missing Person
Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday
Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet
Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33
Jami Proctor-Xu

http://swback.com/issues/011/OneWayofLookingataPoet.html[7/10/20, 9:34:23 PM]

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Atomic Gardening

Adam Strauss

For Octavio Paz
Andrew Marvell
John Milton

The Òmind has mountains
Cliffs of fall
I feel a rolling at
My throat.
Dear what are you doing in those mountains?
Mist mosaics but pierces through touches pines
Not a wall adored by no more than
The marks of its making
Maybe a Ming vase smashed
By a king or
A man walks down a Mayan
Temple a full moon lights
Manifesting his interior
I do not know whether it's better to swim or sink
Like Òstirred up flakes of sediment
Sentiment?
Something valuable prints and
Time freezes;
Memory
Magnetizes: my mind examines minutest filigrees
Follicles
Skinning
Skeining
Making
Me aware of my freedom
From here to there
Across greens
Gardens
In ironies
Growth
We grow closer to each other
Reside in
The heart
Articulates edge
Crossing indeterminable easy to describe as
Existence
Essential primitive
Persuades like ants in adamant; cowslips and rhododendrons:
Our town's most miraculous marge; beauty has me myself for breakfast:
Almost not hungry from the Predawn spread of blues
Affording fine views
Electric
Field finds you through its supple windings
Take wing and we whoosh down winnowed
To instinct: attuned to wind
Window upon the world
And I'm left
This very moment with
The
The at the

Issue 11
Process vs. Product
Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers
all lanzetta

Ars Botanica
Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy
Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom
Chris Carosi

The Missing Person
Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday
Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet
Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33
Jami Proctor-Xu

http://swback.com/issues/011/atomic-gardening.html[7/10/20, 9:34:54 PM]

THE MOOR DANCES Mark Boccard
Fiction
Art

Circumference of central-most musing
Language at-hand defines as forking
Forth from a Universe's fracture
Manufactures force

Done perfecter
In stone
According to the weather; eyes open and

Close on a scene we can

Alter the course of: love
Lies coursing through every person
Whether they're the first second or third

Time walking around a lake
As if infinity isn't fine.

Firmaments fix every fin
Into a finish
Rhapsodically flickers; somewhere sun sparkles a lioness's whisker-tips
Brush against toothsome green as she crops
A salad-cinctured rock
Ringed like a moon

Shines on teeth shred fleet flanks.
I substitutes farandoles for foibles and
Fumble into flashing off:

A bird from a Burning Bush Shrub or

A dash and why do I (it's April)
Write a scene out of season
Displacing us
From where we've
Been?

Conversely
If every moment's a springing
Then April flowers

May have something to do with icy sods
What is a heart?
But to sing an America beautifully pied;
As a red-blooded American I'm proud to say my
Thought's the bride of oh what lovely thinking;
Does I want to move to its heartland and shack up with a country stud
Mean I'm in love with its generic culture
And don't really dig difference or
Does existence embody difference?
Please let us glide

Out of here to have a roof as high as sky
Thunder drops
A garden growing
Through the droppings of many fine sets of wings
An angle
Of descent into a zone whose every shade
Completes a sight till it's bright
Tonight oranges look at their ambergris aureoles
Nare the globes
That compass my ken
Unless you insist it's my earlobes;
The aesthetic I'm in the hearthrob of
Doesn't allow me

To cite a banal but related memory
Blessedly rhymes with we

Walk across a grove; sticking to it

This cross-country train of thought comes to chaos: sometimes Òin a landscape of Having to repeatÓ

Makes redaction
Which isnÓt to say but is

IÓm not a Dane prince
Though one lovely Bloom writes he and E. D.
Can win any

Argument but with themselves;
Should the same be said of me
Disturbs the littlest bit and leastwise this

Azalea curling around a fence
Dividing manicured from a glade
Seeps with your every step
Pressing till cells beat into bloodÓs marrowy birthplace
And the interior originates the exterior:

Only then does your brain
As if itÓs
ÓEmptied some dull opiate to the drainsÓ
Begin addressing what weÓre going throughÓhow marvelous to turn out in another

Hemisphere where itÓs fall.
Reality is Óan effort of affectionÓ so
If thereÓs little effort
OneÓs left with littleÓs real
Or the rightÓs election?

I donÓt believe hierarchies are right:
Why live perpetually night
Instead of the full store spread of daylight
In which there are so many ways to seeÓ
Not even such grandeur as our moon

To circumscribe sight:
Yes you have a point itÓs
Always under threat of seeing;
Adam take away thy vale: see the value of a thing
Itself here-now not the very of visionary;
Tarry awhile said slow;
Sure why not Óve nowhere to go
Than the world which is everywhere.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Adam Strauss

Adam Strauss has poems out in *Fact-Simile* and *Fence*, and will soon be a featured Artist on the [Tusculum Review](#) website. "Atomic Gardening" is from a manuscript titled *Braided Sand*.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Atomic Gardening
Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submissions](#)

[contributors](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[staff](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[issues](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

http://swback.com/issues/011/bios/Adam_Strauss.html[7/10/20, 9:35:02 PM]

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

The Story

[Jennifer Skogen](#)

My mother loved my father.
But, after several beers at a Christmas party, he climbed a friend's radio tower while my mother held my sister, who was just a few months old then, and cursed up at him.
Silently. The words clouding the air as she breathed out through her teeth.

This was the story she told me
so many years later, after the car accident.
When we all went to see him at the funeral parlor, my mother didn't speak but kept running her fingers through his hair.
She was so mad at him.

When she started dating again
her boyfriend spoke to me about my father. They had been friends for twenty years. He wanted to tell me a funny story about the two of them, so he told me about the night he threw a Christmas party.

While driving back from the store he hit an owl, but didn't discover the body until his wife (ex-wife now) pointed to the grill.
The owl didn't look too bad. It wasn't broken, visibly. The body was a brilliant white, and when he spread the wings out in the snow, they made the owl look huge, like spreading a cloth over an old chair.
When the owl's body stiffened, the wings stayed that way.

And when he and my father climbed the radio tower to throw the owl from the top at that moment they saw it so clearly:
they would make it fly.

SHARE

...

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers

all lanzetta

Ars Botanica

Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy

Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom

Chris Carosi

The Missing Person

Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday

Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening

Adam Strauss

The Story

Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford

Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)

Cedar Sigo

Vinculum

Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

December 33

Jami Proctor-Xu

http://swback.com/issues/011/story.html[7/10/20, 9:35:22 PM]

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Jennifer Skogen

Jennifer Skogen is a recent graduate from University of San Francisco's MFA in Writing Program and lives on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. She currently splits her time between thinking deep, serious thoughts about poetry, and reading too many YA fantasy novels.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

The Story

Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submissions](#)

[contributors](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[staff](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[issues](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

birds who eat flowers
ali lanzetta

Ars Botanica
Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy
Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom
Chris Carosi

The Missing Person
Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday
Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NIJINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33
Jami Proctor-Xu

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Cedar Sigo

Cedar Sigo is 32 years old and moved to San Francisco in 1999. His books include *Goodnight Nurse*, *Thank you Letters*, two editions of *Selected Writings* (UDP) *Expensive Magic*, and most recently a book of drawings, *Portraits*. *Stranger In Town* is forthcoming from City Lights Books in Fall 2010.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Notes on Joan Crawford

Poetry

Untitled (NUINSKY)

Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submision information](#)

[contributors](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[staff](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[issues](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Untitled (NIJINSKY)

Cedar Sigo

Lots to confess, your best interests,
if you are so inclined to backroom
show buisness memoir, *His Eye is On
The Sparrow*- "I just slip in and out" and
seem to be drawn to a place by folks who don't
know where they want me but I do in fact appear. Then
held over several weeks (backroom)(bloodsucking)(donkey \$how)
I once saw a picture of John Wieners arriving to an opening of John Chamberlains (twisted) with a not quite long
enough ponytail greased. He appeared to be sleepwalking. I think it was mid-sixties. I am wearing a more Genet
style sailors top now, about to run down to the dock. The fleets come in. I could have had them all along. ten
years. I've loved you once too hard and twice too soft now. Three times a lady.

SHARE

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers
all lanzetta

Ars Botanica
Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy
Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom
Chris Carosi

The Missing Person
Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy
Sunday
Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet
Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NIJINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33
Jami Proctor-Xu

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Vinculum

Katharyn M. Browne

for Walt Whitman.

Barb and spine,
column and procession
rungs of helix fit
under lens. This rough art
stammers forward.
A ligature fits
between shadow
and foreground
of pealing and striking
marches or hymns.
Carbon, carbon, carbon,
phosphate, arc
and bend, arc and bend!

Fits and starts
meet in concealed mesh:
a grid, a filter, a screen.
Invisible and tangible
the combined effect
stitches souls
and bodies. Filament,
filament, diaphysis,
wire stretch between
thighs and language,
sound and teeth.

SHARE

...

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers
all lanzetta

Ars Botanica
Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy
Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom
Chris Carosi

The Missing Person
Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday
Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet
Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33
Jami Proctor-Xu

http://swback.com/issues/011/vinculum.html[7/10/20, 9:36:40 PM]

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

For a time, a rising certainty, arising into the evening. I was everyday anointed, annoying still, but adult and in the stable. Seen and valued, I was poised and punctured, to light up. My time!Blessed be the institution. All I needed was to follow. Pray? With miles as a calling card, how could you desist? Tell? All I needed was to shake off the shavings of the destitute academic to arrive in the cosmology of poetry, both literal and glittery. All gone to slipshod, shake and ruin. All gone to go there. All gone to prepare ye the way whilst I do the dishes. All gone to boo-yah, all gone to meh, all gone to YouTube yahoos and you-know-whos. You. All gone to hops to barleys to absinthe to Chartreuse, to crème de menthe by the bucketfuls. All gone to the bucks of the crème de la crème, the crème de la soul and Honey Nut Cheerios, chim chim cher-ee, old chap! Old chip off the chipper chopping block, mon cher, mon frère, mes amis. For a time.

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers

all lanzetta

Ars Botanica

Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy

Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom

Chris Carosi

The Missing Person

Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday

Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening

Adam Strauss

The Story

Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford

Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)

Cedar Sigo

Vinculum

Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

December 33

Jami Proctor-Xu

SHARE

http://swback.com/issues/011/our-time.html[7/10/20, 9:37:05 PM]

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Dunstan Christopher

Born in Detroit, Dunstan Christopher currently resides in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, where he wakes every morning to gaze wistfully at the Hollywood sign. His first chapbook, *Motives*, is being published this spring by the g.e. collective in collaboration with Poetry Flash. More of his writing, music, and visual work can be found at [Catastrophic Imagination](#).

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

For Our Time

Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submissions information](#)

[contributors](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[staff](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[issues](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

December 33

Jami Proctor-Xu

After Liu Manliu

a white swift flies to a woman in a lake of leaves
hanging mid-sky winter memory of harvest moon
golden glow of hair interwoven with cloud-strands
 she dreams leaves upward
 autumn not falling
a soul multiple enough to hold anything

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

birds who eat flowers

all lanzetta

Ars Botanica

Katharyn M. Browne

The B-Boy

Martha Grover

The Lonely Freedom

Chris Carosi

The Missing Person

Maureen Alsop

Upon Revisiting the Birthplace of the Preacher Billy Sunday

Eric Rawson

One Way of Looking at a Poet

Stephen Maurer

Atomic Gardening

Adam Strauss

The Story

Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford

Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)

Cedar Sigo

Vinculum

Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

December 33

Jami Proctor-Xu

SHARE

THE MOOR DANCES

Mark Boccia

CLARINET

(a translation of music from Stravinsky's *Petrushka*)

Characters per line

- D = 24
E = 26.6 --> 27
F = 28.4 --> 28
F# = 30
G = 32
A = 36
B = 40

2 lines = 1/16th note tri
3 lines = 1/16th note
6 lines = 1/8th note
12 lines = 1/4 note

3/4

36 lines = 1 measure = 1 page

Text Source (for the first line of each note):: Marinetti's Manifesto of the Futurist Dance, 1917

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

THE MOOR DANCES

[Mark Boccard](#)

SHE WILL STEP ACROSS IT BREAKING THROUGH

THE MOOR DANCES

[Mark Boccard](#)

SHE WILL STEP ACROSS IT BREAKING THROUGH

SHE WILL STEP ACROSS IT BREAKING THROUGH

HE LL T O T EA R

SHE LL S I N T O

W A S T E

WIL T ING

WI T H

S W E A T

SH E A T E N O

S T A R S TH OUGH

SH E

S E LL S T E N T O

SHE EP C IT ING ROUGH

VELLUM PAPER IN THE FORM OF A SUNSET

TH A T

V AP OR S N ET

DEPRIVE ONESELF OF THE VIVIFYING

D IVE O F F IV Y

D R YING

MOVEMENTS OF MACHINES WITH GESTURES;

MO T O R S

M E E T CH E E R S

OV E R

T H E W E T

MO O N S W I G S.

THE DANSEUSE WILL HOLD UP A SIGN

AN D

THE N USE WIL D

TH E SE S

T O

T E A SE P A I N

She will step across it breaking through hell to tear shells into waste, wilting with sweat. She ate no stars though she sells ten to sheep citing rough vellum paper in the form of a sunset that vapors net. Deprive oneself of the vivifying dive off ivy, drying movements of machines with gestures; motors meet cheers over the wet moon's wigs. The Danseuse will hold up a sign and then use wild theses to tease pain.

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

of previous work

new projects in progress

archive of past work

about the magazine

at Work >

Vinculum

Kathryn M. Browne

For Our Time

Dunstan Christopher

December 33

Page 2 of 6

[<<](#) [1](#) **[2](#)** [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [>>](#)

Switchback

homeissuescontributorssubmissionsstaffcomments

video

links

THE MOOR DANCES

[Mark Boccard](#)

LITTLE LEAPING HANDCLAPS AND

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010



at Work >

THE MOOR DANCES

[Mark Boccard](#)

LITTLE LEAPING HANDCLAPS AND
L E A D
L I P S
T E L L
L I E S A
L E G C L A D
IN THE DANCE FOR THAT IDEAL
N E A R T I D A L
I C E
T H E N H A D
T O H E A L
I F R E A L
M O T I O N S O F E C H O E S I N R A V I N E S
M O V E
T H E N
M I N E S A V E
M O R E
M O O N S F O R V I N E S
A L A R G E C E L L U L O I D P R O P E L L E R T H A T
L E T
A L L L P R O P E R
A R T
L E E R A T
A C I D L E T
T H E M A C H I N E A N D T H E G R E A T E X P L O S I V E S
T E A C H D E E P
M E N T O
T A N T H E S E
E E R I E
T H I E V E S
T H E M E C H A N I C A L N O I S E O F S H R A P N E L
I S A
M O R E
T E C H N I C A L
T O O L
T H A N A S E A L

Little leaping handclaps and lead lips tell lies. A leg clad in the dance for that ideal near tidal ice then had to heal. If real motions of echoes in ravines move, then mine save more moons for vines. A large celluloid propeller that let all proper art leer at acid let the machine and the great explosives teach deep men to tan these eerie thieves. The mechanical noise of shrapnel is a more technical tool than a seal.

acher Billy

Switchback

home issues contributors submissions staff comments

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

video links

THE MOOR DANCES

Mark Boccard

POETRY THAT NAVIGATES WITHIN

THE MOOR DANCES

Mark Boccard

POETRY THAT NAVIGATES WITHIN

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

Work >

POETRY THAT NAVIGATES WITHIN

P E N S

TR I ES IT IN

O R A N G E WITH

P E T A N T S THIN

P A G ES I N

THE RUBBING TOGETHER OR THE

T R I T E OR E

IN THE

T U N E

G O THER E

T O O HE

WILL SIMULATE WITH JERKS AND

S E W

W I T H

W AT T S

TH E

W I L T E D

WILL SCATTER GOLDEN STARS ON THE

L ATTER. O N A

W I LD T R O T

T O T HE

W AT ER D AR T

W E ST S HE

WILL COME FORWARD ON HANDS AND KNEES

W O R N AND

L E A N A S A

M O R O N S

W E A K

W A N D S

IN OPEN FIELDS AND UP THE SLOPES

O F S AND THE S E

IN F AN T S

PE EL A P E S O

O U T

I F HE LOPES

Poetry that navigates within pens tries it in orange with pet ants. Thin pages in the rubbing together or the trite ore in the tune go there too. He will simulate with jerks and sew with watts. The wilted will scatter golden stars on the latter. On a wild trot to the water, dart west. She will come forward on hands and knees, worn and lean as a moron's weak wands. In open fields and up the slopes of sand, these infants peel a peso out if he lopes.

acher Billy

Page 4 of 6

<< 1 2 3 4 5 6 >>

December 33

homeissuescontributorssubmissionsstaffcomments

video

links

THE MOOR DANCES

Mark Boccard

VIOLENTLY COLORED GEOGRAPHICAL

THE MOOR DANCES

Mark Boccard

VIOLENTLY COLORED GEOGRAPHICAL

Violently colored geographical tree vine! Go all with the divine machines of ten chins when/if nature will vibrate with a late trill at it. Art ate a new bath that was supposed to embody the tomb as used hats set my poem--'twas seedy!

acher Billy

<<123456>>

SHARE

Atomic GardeningN
Adam Strauss

The Story
Jennifer Skogen

Notes on Joan Crawford
Cedar Sigo

Untitled (NUINSKY)
Cedar Sigo

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33

DANCE OF GEOMETRIZED VOICES WAS CREATED

THE MOOR DANCES

Mark Boccia

ANCE OF GEOMETRIZED VOLUMES WAS CREATED

[illegible]

Page 6 of 6

<< 1 2 3 4 5 **6**

Dance of geometrized volumes was created at a date set near to no time as doors got less notice. Anger, dust, and gems dozed. Voles wasted the form and color of a stary night for a doofy thorn. Colorant pours steadily and violently out, and to pen it as it passes over the soldier's head is to read it as sad. At a sordid rain and the sighing of the wind, I hit a high note, raising in a designed, ranting end.

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

Vinculum
Katharyn M. Browne

For Our Time
Dunstan Christopher

December 33

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Mark Boccia

Mark Boccard is a poet and musician living in Oakland. "The Moor Dances," which appears in issue 11 of *Switchback*, is part of a book-length project involving the translation of music from Stravinsky's ballet, *Petrushka*, into text. Mark is currently finishing an MFA in Poetry at Mills College.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

THE MOOR DANCES
Poetry

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#) [contributors](#) [staff](#) [issues](#) [comments](#) [links](#)
[submission information](#) [email the webmaster](#) [email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Apala

Jason Nemec

Maena

Susan Green

The Lonely Story

Mark Gozensky

Home Improvements

Christine Meade

out back by the rabbit pen

Calder Lorenz

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms

Andrew Valencia

Art

Apala

Jason Nemec

I wasn't always an ugly man. When I was nineteen and living over in Springfield, my parents' house was struck by lightning. I survived the fire. My parents did not. My face, which an old girlfriend had once compared to Robert Redford's, didn't really survive either. Well, it did, but most of it looks like the crust of a pizza, so if you want to call that surviving, fine. But that was all a long time ago, and I don't much care to talk about it. It doesn't bother me, not any more than where you come from might bother you. It's just that I don't see the point in talking about it.

It was so long ago anyway. It was way before I moved in with my cousin here in Cambridge, just outside of Harvard Square. He manages a restaurant in the Square, a Mediterranean joint set down from the street next to the Brattle Theater. The jukebox in the bar there ð all soul tunes and Sinatra ð is the only thing that place has going for it, and I tell Denny that all the time. He tolerates me. I live in the basement of his apartment. I give him some of the insurance money every month for rent. We eat one meal a week together, on Sunday evenings.

The good thing about Denny is that he can understand me. When I talk, it comes out pretty jumbled, the words all stretched out like when you're listening to a record that keeps slowing down. For most people, I have to write down what I'm trying to say. My handwriting's terrible, because my hand got all mashed up in the fire, but if somebody has the patience to read through my scribbling, they usually figure out that I'm a whole lot smarter than I look. I'm really a pretty witty guy. At first I thought that's how I fell in with Apala. I wanted to believe she was attracted to my wit.

I was at my cousin's restaurant having a beer when she walked in and took a stool diagonal from me at the bar. It was a warm day in September, around four in the afternoon, and I had just come from sitting in The Pit, over by the T, where that crazy Asian guy with the weird stringed instrument that looks like a cross between a violin and a bong was going mad on the thing, ripping up the air with all those crazy notes of his. I get a kick out of listening to that guy. But then some kids I didn't recognize showed up and started staring at me, so I decided to come grab a beer. Fabian was working, and I liked him. My cousin always did a good job of hiring really patient bartenders. Anyway, I was writing to Fabian about the Red Sox and the pennant race when this girl came in and ordered a glass of white wine and right away I thought she was beautiful. Golden copper skin, straight black hair, green eyes. But she had an air about her, like either she didn't know she was beautiful, or she worked hard to make you *think* she didn't know she was beautiful. Which basically means she looked you in the eye when she talked to you, and seemed to care about what you were trying to say more than how you were seeing her. And let's be honest, I'm not an easy guy to look at.

She pulled a huge book from her bag and set it on the bar and flipped it open. A minute later she took the wine glass by the stem and lifted it to her lips and that's when she caught me staring at her. I smiled. When I smile, I can never seem to get the skin around my mouth to pull my lips up and show any of my teeth. She understood what I was about though, and smiled back. I tried to ask her about her book, but she couldn't

understand what I was saying. I set to reaching for my pen, which had rolled to the inside lip of the bar, out of my reach. She looked like she might have been about to come help me, but Fabian came by and placed the pen in the crook of my right hand. "What are you reading?" I finally wrote. I slid my notepad toward her and she leaned over to read. She smelled like rain, even though it hadn't rained in a week. I thought of her taking a shower, which gave me a flicker of excitement and then a faint pulse of shame.

"Oh this," she said. "Behavioral psychology. It's a real page-turner." Again with the smile. We were the only two customers in the place, and her voice seemed almost too loud.

"What?" Fabian said. He was pulling the stems off of mint leaves at the other end of the bar, and had thought she was talking to him. "Oh, I'm sorry," he said, and went back to his work.

"What's that you have on your hat?" she asked me. My favorite hat was sitting next to me on the bar. It's this red baseball cap with a big marijuana leaf on it. I get a real kick out of it. Nobody knows what to think of me when they first see me, and then they see the hat and they *really* don't know what to think of me, but at least then they usually lighten up.

I just laughed and wrote: "Hey, it's from the earth." She laughed too. We introduced ourselves and I kind of wished my name was exotic like hers. It's Jim though, the same as my dad.

It took a little while, but before long, Apala was able to understand me when I talked. She did most of the talking at first. She told me how she had come from India to get a graduate degree in psychology. She had funny stories about her family, about how her mom, who was only four and half feet tall, used to sometimes chase her dad around the house with the filleted skin of a fish whenever he made her mad. He was terrified of blood and Apala said he would run away like a scared little girl.

As she talked the bar began to fill up. Older couples, businessmen, and a handful of college kids belled up to the varnished wood all around us. Some of the clientele recognized me and said hey; Tom from the theater gave me a slap on the back as he passed. Brent the other manager asked me if I wanted to hear anything in particular on the jukebox. Apala beamed at all this. Then she suddenly turned her body to face me. Her eyes changed; they seemed to exhale as she studied me. "Jim," she said, her voice sounding less loud amidst all the new noise. "What happened to you to make you look like that?" It was the question that most people wanted to ask but almost no one ever did. Apala was as direct as anyone had ever been about it without being malicious.

The few times anyone had ever asked me anything along those lines, I either ignored them or I scribbled something about being born like this. People don't believe in lightning strikes. They think it only happens in the movies. But with Apala, like I said, she was really looking at me like she cared and she was beautiful and I couldn't help myself. I leaned in and told her everything. It all came pouring out. How the fire seemed to come out of nowhere, how it was raining from the thunderstorm but that didn't stop the flames, how I was trapped in my room because the door was swallowed by the blaze and I could smell my own flesh burning but there was nowhere for me to go and then the floor gave out and I blacked out and when I came to I was in the hospital all bandaged up and listening to some doctor talk really slowly about how my parents didn't make it. Then I told Apala something I had never told anyone before, how, when I heard that my parents had died, for a few minutes I felt almost relieved, because we'd never got along that well before anyway, especially me and my dad. He never hit me, but he used to get drunk and spit his chewing tobacco at me sometimes, then call me a baby if I complained about it to my mom.

I was staring off toward all the bottles of booze behind the bar, off at nothing really, while I was telling Apala all that. When I finally got done talking, I brought my eyes back around to her, but she wasn't looking at me. She was writing furiously in her notebook. "What happened after that?" she said, still writing, still not looking at me. I glanced at her notebook on the bar. I could make out the word "Subject" at the top of the page, followed by my

name.

I pushed my stool away from the bar and struggled to fish a five-dollar bill out of my wallet. But I couldn't seem to get my fingers around the money.

"Jim, what's wrong?" Apala said. She had stopped writing, but was still holding her pen. It's hard for people to tell when I'm upset, because the one side of my face is twisted in a sort of permanent smirk, but my disgust must have traveled to my eyes because Apala finally put the pen down. I put my five on the bar and stood up slowly, holding onto my stool for support. "Hey wait," she said. "Let me buy your beer."

For all the words colliding in my head at that moment, I couldn't seem to make any of them fit through my mouth. "No" was the only thing I could get to come out at first, and then "I'm not a monkey." It sounded about as stupid as I felt, but blistered with anger as I was, it was the best I could come up with. Fabian shouted something as I limped through the bar, but I was outside past the theater and up the stairs to the street before I could even hear anything again.

The Square was crowded. On the other side of Brattle, near the flower shop, that one lanky old guy had set up his plywood booth and was singing show tunes in his creepy high voice. I had an urge to knock him over as I moved past. In between his warbling, I could hear Apala calling my name from off somewhere behind me, but I didn't turn around. She caught up to me near the entrance to the T, where she put her hand on my elbow and said: "Please stop."

Her fingers were small. Her little nails dug into my skin. I stopped.

Right then, a well-dressed man and woman came up from the subway. "Apala! How are you?" the man said.

"It's been so long!" the woman said. She moved in to embrace Apala, but saw me and took a sort of stutter step back again. Then they were both watching me, the man's eyes cut in a glare as if I might suddenly start drooling and take a bite out of his wife.

Apala took her hand off my elbow. "This is Jim," she said. "He's É" And as she trailed off, searching her mind for whatever I was to her at that moment, I smiled at the beautiful couple then swiveled my mangled face in Apala's direction, moving in to kiss her.

But my feet caught on the bricks and I fell into her instead, knocking both of us to the ground. I felt her smooth skin against my scars and still I tried to kiss her, but then the man kicked me hard in the ribs. I curled away as the couple helped Apala to her feet. They put their arms around her as if to comfort and shield her.

"It's okay," she kept saying. She looked at me on the ground, where I was slow in getting up. "It's okay," she said to me, even though we both knew it wasn't.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#) [contributors](#) [staff](#) [issues](#) [comments](#) [links](#)
[submission information](#) [email the webmaster](#) [email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Jason Nemec

Jason Nemec’s poetry has appeared in *Meridian*, *Rattle*, *Controlled Burn*, *Nimrod*, on the web at *Verse Daily* and *storySouth*, and in various other publications. He is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Cincinnati, where he is at work on a novel. “Apala” is his first published story.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Apala
Fiction

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submision information](#)

[contributors](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[staff](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[issues](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

Maena

[Susan Green](#)



It's bearably hot, but just barely. Beyond the porch the field reflects sunlight like a great, green mirror. Max lifts his head to drink and flies scuttle around his head, dipping their legs into the corners of his eyes. Grandma and I don't move at all, not even for water, we just sit and stare out off the porch while the cicadas scream.

Dad's car turns in off the main road. Our heads don't move but our eyes turn to watch it trundle up the driveway, gravel hisses and pops beneath the tires.

He rolls down his window as he pulls up to the porch. "Whew, it's hot out," he says, peering at the three of us. Dad makes a smile-like movement with his mouth and says, "Staying cool?"

Grandma says yeah and Dad gets out, walks around to the back of the car and opens the cooler in his trunk.

"Here, I got you these," he says. He tosses a package of hamburger patties to me and I catch it. They feel good

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

[<Previous Work](#)[Next Work >](#)

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

[Apala](#)
[Jason Nemeo](#)

[Maena](#)
[Susan Green](#)

[The Lonely Story](#)
[Mark Gozonsky](#)

[Home Improvements](#)
[Christine Meade](#)

[out back by the rabbit pen](#)
[Calder Lorenz](#)

[Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms](#)
[Andrew Valencia](#)

Art

in my hands, cool and firm, slivers of ice flow off the plastic and onto my toes.

I walk down the porch stairs into the shimmering green yard. The Weber is over by the telephone pole. I light a piece of starter wood in its ash-coated bowl and pile charcoal over the starter in a neat pyramid. The smoke stings my eyes so I sit down in the grass a few feet away. My legs are prickly and my skin feels sticky-slick like I'd showered in canola.

Sitting there near the Weber, waiting on the coals to catch, I look out across the field of soybeans behind the house. I can see the Amish boy on the tractor, a small black dot over a larger white spot over a red machine. On his first day, the boy asked my dad if we had TV in our house. My dad said yeah and the boy had blinked and nodded slowly.

I can't see his face from here but I'd like to bring him in and turn on MTV or VH1. Give him a pop. Maybe wrap him up with that quilt my great-grandmother made, in that bedroom my great-grandfather built. I'd like to smell that bright white shirt.

The coals have caught and I spread them out before putting the wire grill on and spreading the patties out over its greasy black surface. I can feel a pimple surfacing through my upper lip. Once the patties begin to blacken and run clear I will flip the plastic package they came in over, stack the hamburgers on top, and take them into the house.

Inside, Grandma has laid out three paper plates and a bag of Lays. When I come in she asks me what kind of pop I want and I tell her. Dad is sitting at the table drinking an orange Crush. He gives me an orange grin.

"This old house," Grandma murmurs, her lavender-veined eyes scan the peeling wallpaper, the rusty coal burning stove, the dusty everything. "I was born in this house," she says.

"You sure were," says dad, enunciating carefully before pushing a palmful of potato chips into his mouth.

"Maena raised us all in this house, all eight of us, she was like a mother to me. In fact, when I was little I thought Maena was my mother."

"C'mon, Mama, you knew who your mother was, you knew Maena was your sister," says Dad. Now he gives her the orange grin.

"I did too think Maena was my mother." Grandma's voice is becoming shrill. "She's the one that bathed us and cooked for us, got us up in the morning and took care of us and put us to bed. That's why she didn't never go to school. I did think Maena was my mother and I miss her more than my mother!"

Dad makes a chuckling sound. "Okay, okay, alright," he says. Dad puts his hands up, palms facing forward on either side of his face to say: I'm innocent.

I think about that bright white shirt.

“I’ll tell you why I’m sad because I’m real.” And here the sentence commenced sobbing so disconsolately the story knew it would just have to let the sentence go on like that for a while. That was all right. The story had time. It wasn’t going anywhere.

Although actually, that might not be so true, because now the story had what it had been searching for all along: a beginning.

“Forgive me for going on and on like a paragraph,” the sentence finally said, when it had composed itself.

“No problem,” the story replied. “I’m sad a lot too. But tell me why is it a problem that you’re real? I thought being real was good and true.”

“Hah!” spat the sentence. “Tell that to my author. He thinks that for a sentence to be good, it has to be made-up.”

“Who’s your author?” the story asked.

“Some guy no one has ever heard of,” the sentence replied bitterly.

“Well, what does he know?” the story said. “You don’t have to listen to him. And besides, making stuff up is easy.”

“Maybe for you it is,” said the sentence. “But it’s all over for me. I’m done. I have a period at the end of me.”

“That’s nothing to worry about,” said the story. “You’re just a draft. Anything can still happen to you. Anything!”

“Really?” asked the sentence, excited for the first time since it was written.

“Sure,” said the story. “Let’s just brainstorm a little.”

Before long they had come up with two lists. One was about steps, and the other was about Our.

Steps

- Marble
- Brick
- Spanish tile
- Wood?
- Whitewashed stone
- Plastic

Our

- A brother and sister living together after both parents killed in car accident.
- Unemployed mom and dad plus disabled son.
- Seemingly happy family of four: mom, dad, high school age boys. Dad with dark secret about to destroy them.
- Dolls in dollhouse.
- Childless couple, in middle of middle age, no pets.
- King and queen in castle.

When they were finished, the story and the sentence gazed upon their list with pleasure, but they were soon interrupted by a loud, impatient voice.

“That’s all well and good,” the voice said, “but I don’t really like any of those ideas. None of them get to the heart of my situation.”

And here the voice began to sigh giant heaving sighs.

“What is that awful noise?” asked the story.

“That’s my author,” said the sentence.

“I see,” the story replied. Then it did something it hadn’t expected to do. It spoke back to the author.

“Why don’t you keep out of it!” said the story. “How do you even know anything anyway? You talk about the heart of your situation, but what kind of heart do you have, writing a sentence and then abandoning it? You should be ashamed of yourself. Your sentence has a chance at life, and all you can do is complain. Why can’t you just have the decency to be quiet and stay out of our way!”

The sentence looked at the story with admiring surprise, and the story just shrugged, and smiled a little smile, as if it said brave things like that all the time.

“Now then,” the story said. “Where were we?”

The sentence quoted itself:

The steps leading up to our house: they’re eroding.

“Fine,” said the story. “Excellent start. You’ve done your part. Let me take it from here.”

This should not be happening to us.

“Ooh, I like that!” the sentence blurted out. The story would have smiled again, but it was concentrating.

I understand about rocks eroding in nature. Wind, rain, tectonic plates, all that. But this is our HOUSE. It’s not NATURE. That’s the whole point. If we wanted to live in nature we could buy a yurt and live on a cliff outside of Santa Cruz. The whole point is, we don’t want to do that. We want to live right here, supposedly protected from the elements, and also from lawsuits brought by leafletters who break their leg stepping on one of our cracking steps of so-called stone. Shouldn’t the original owners have gotten some kind of treatment or something before we bought the place to prevent this kind of thing from happening? Some kind of polyurethane?

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms

Andrew Valencia

I

Vincent had been in Paris for three weeks. He stood outside the Saint-Michel Metro station looking up at the statue at the top of the fountain of Saint Michael. He liked the way the statue looked. As he stood reading the stone plaques beneath it, an old man passing by stopped beside him.

“It’s a fantastic statue, isn’t it?” the old man said.

“Yes, it is,” Vincent replied. His mind was distracted. There was a lot to think over.

“What do the plaques commemorate?” the old man asked him.

“French dead of World War II.”

“Ah,” the old man replied. He nodded slightly and then walked away.

Vincent looked at the fountain a little longer, and then walked away himself. Somewhere in the city there was joy to be found.

II

The statue of Saint Michael glared down at Vincent, its face cold, dark bronze with an aura, or halo perhaps, of animation looking serene and calm even in the face of immeasurable victory. The Archangel stood triumphant with his bare foot planted on the back of the Great Renegade while below the water sat tepid and still, unfed by either of the lion-headed dragons at the sides of the fountain.

Taking a moment to examine the fountain brought a sense of alertness to Vincent, who had been walking inattentively and decidedly not-like-a-tourist since he left his host family’s apartment that morning. He liked the way the statue at the top looked. They didn’t have anything like it in California, despite the attempts of many to try to replicate the old world. The aspects he admired the most were those that had been sculpted by time—the pigeon shit crowning the head of Lucifer, the faded tiles where the water would be flowing, the dark algae tracing their borders. There’s nothing like time for creating nostalgia and then converting it into mournful beauty. Only distance can rival it.

A stranger brushed past Vincent’s arm as he hurried towards the metro station to the side of the fountain. It was the early afternoon. The streets were busy and Vincent was in the way of things. From each of the converging streets poured an influx of locals as well as foreigners, recognizable by the way they stopped to take pictures of everything and devoured kebobs while walking on the street. Vincent was one of them too now—a foreigner, a stranger in this land.

As he stood reading the plaques, an old man who had been walking by stopped a few feet next to him. He was dressed in a heavily padded coat that seemed excessive even for the Paris winter. The hood was pulled up and through it Vincent could see a long nose poking out between two thick glass frames. The face it belonged to was very pale and red from the cold.

“It’s a fantastic statue, isn’t it?” the old man said. Vincent recognized his accent as American

Issue 11

Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Page 1 of 2 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Apala

Jason Nemec

Maena

Susan Green

The Lonely Story

Mark Gozonsky

Home Improvements

Christine Meade

out back by the rabbit pen

Calder Lorenz

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms

Andrew Valencia

Art

http://swback.com/issues/011/Saint-Michel/1.html[7/10/20, 11:06:19 PM]

instantly. How the old man had recognized him was uncertain. Usually it's only the rest of the world who can see us for what we are.

“Yes, it is,” Vincent replied.

The old man smiled and rubbed his hands together vigorously. The French never smile at strangers; Americans smile compulsively at everyone. How often do faces really convey the truth?

“What do the plaques commemorate?” the old man asked.

“French dead of World War II.” Vincent had blurted the answer out rather casually. He could afford to be casual about the war with a fellow American, even one who was old enough to have memories of what it had been like to live through it. The war belonged to Vincent as much as anyone. Memories fade easily, but images are immortal. And he had the same images of the war as any American. Pearl Harbor. Iwo Jima. Tom Hanks storming Omaha Beach. Cast them in white marble and erect them in every city—monuments to our last true moment with our foot on the back of the Devil. Somewhere in America, a cousin he barely knew was nursing his wounds in a crowded VA hospital, courtesy of an Iraqi roadside bomb.

“Ah,” the old man said, and nodded contentedly. He seemed to wait for Vincent to say something else, and then, finding he had nothing more to offer, turned and walked towards the metro.

Vincent watched the figure of the old man descend down the steps into the tunnel below. He was not a vigorous old man and there was a limp to his walk. It was dangerous for him to be out in the cold, for him to be taking those steps. If he did fall or get sick, Vincent considered, it would be better for it to happen in France than back in the US. His own grandfather was not so lucky. Neither was his cousin. The whole world was piled with the dead and the infirm. And Vincent here in Paris. Here, trying to find some kind of joy in all this.

He stood for some time more gazing up at the statue of the Archangel before turning and walking away. A dry freezing wind rushed over his face.

III

Vincent stood before the Archangel Michael at the intersection of two busy Paris streets. He liked the way the statue at the top looked. But the Archangel's stoic face seemed to conceal a far less angelic message. Vincent could hear the angel calling on him—“Submit! Submit, mortal, to the will of God!”

It was a sin for him to be here in Paris, under the guise of someone who could afford to travel widely abroad as a student of the world, when back home in the real world it was still the Winter of Despair. His cousin wounded from war. His grandfather in the hospital. His mother working herself ragged to keep the family afloat. All the money he had now he owed to the university.

“The Lord God is the same God of financial aid,” the Archangel said. “The same God of diabetes and of roadside bombs. He giveth and He taketh away.”

A stranger brushed past Vincent's arm and he barely noticed. What does the Bible say about joy? It is a gift for those who have faith. A lot of good that did Vincent, a nonbeliever. And yet he still felt humbled and terrified by depictions of angels and demons. The power of the deity never leaves the images of its acolytes, even when the deity itself is gone.

“You cannot escape judgment,” said the Archangel. “You ran from it in America, but you shall find it in France just as well.”

An old man stopped on the street beside him. He was very pale and he had his hood pulled over his head with the chords fastened tightly—the Angel of Death? No, not for him. Just for the rest of the world. The old man remarked about how fantastic the statue was.

“Yes, it is,” Vincent replied. Fantastic is a good word. It conveys impressiveness and fictitiousness at the

same time. Vincent could tell the Archangel was not pleased with the old man’s choice of words.

“What do the plaques commemorate?” the old man asked.

“The ground you walk on is saturated with the blood of martyrs,” the Archangel reminded Vincent.

“When they were your age they gave their lives for something bigger than themselves. But you can’t deal with anything bigger than yourself. You couldn’t face sorrow at home, and now you can find no real joy abroad.”

Vincent turned to look at the old man. “French dead of World War II,” he answered.

“Ah.” The old man nodded. His red cheeks were chapped from the cold and flakes of dead skin hung from his face. And he was a very old man. Vincent wished that he would be okay in the cold.

“The Lord taketh when and where He sees fit,” the stubborn Archangel reminded him.

The old man walked off towards the metro station. Just then the wind began to pick up. Vincent could feel a cruel angel’s wings at work. He lingered a little longer, then fastened his scarf and headed down the street alone. When will the prodigal son return?



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [staff](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [issues](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

http://swback.com/issues/011/lonely-story/2.html[7/10/20, 11:05:30 PM]

“An itinerant stonemason,” reiterated the seventh sentence.

“He fixes the problem by patching the cracked steps and suspending the laws of nature,” clarified the eighth.

“He looks like a guy who once could have been a long and lanky pitching prospect, but then fell on hard times, steroids, gambling, everything, and then just continued imploding until now he’s just this sunburned dude with oily long blond hair in a ragged flannel shirt even though it’s well into the eighties outside.”

This from the author again. The sentences did not make fun of how he went on and on. Because at least he was trying, and contributing, and that was so much better than before, when he was just running around tyrannizing everyone about how things had to be fiction all the time.

“All right,” the story stepped in. “So let me see if I understand where this is going. The lanky stonemason suspends the laws of nature. Then, incrementally larger animal corpses begin showing up on the narrator’s front lawn: crow, one day; squirrel, the next; then possum, then dog. The day of the dog, that’s a very sad day. We’re sad for the dog. It’s a lab/husky mix, the nicest kind of dog. Everyone is sad. The narrator gazes out his window at the sorry sight, and he gets the picture. He sees where this is going. He can’t just stick the dog’s body in a baggy and stick it in the Yard Waste Only can like he’s done with the others. The dog’s body is just too big. Plus, it’s a dog, not some critter. So he calls animal control and then goes back to gazing out the window, wondering what remains are going to show up on his lawn the next day. What’s the logical progression? A pony? A dolphin? It’s just too horrific to contemplate.”

The story paused, and the sentences all applauded, which made the story feel better than it had in a long, long time.

“What happens next?” asked the first sentence.

“Well, I’m not really sure,” the story admitted. “Either the narrator goes searching for the stonemason’s card, or else he sees the stonemason standing out on the sidewalk, waving at him, the pseudo-pitying mock-sympathetic wave you always see when the antagonist turns the tables in the movies.”

“Or the narrator could be startled by the smash of a broken window.”

The sentences all looked around to see who had spoken. It was the author.

“Go on,” said the story.

“The stonemason used the narrator’s twenty dollars to buy new baggies full of decorative rocks and his business card, to throw on people’s driveways, for marketing.”

“And he threw it too hard on purpose through the narrator’s window, just to stick it to him,” extended the third sentence.

“And because he had been a promising pitching prospect,” elaborated the fourth.

The author felt a warm glow at having his ideas picked up and run with by his sentences.

“That’s exactly what happens,” the story decided. “And you know the rest. The stonemason says yes, he thinks he can fix the problem, but it’s going to cost a lot more money. Two grand to reverse the curse, plus another two hundred for proper removal of the bodies. You can’t just toss them in the trash. There’s a big fine for that.

“Great, good, whatever,” says the narrator. “Just keep my steps fixed and stop the body count.”

“I’ll do what I can,” says the stonemason. The narrator accepts in a flash of insight that he can’t insist on a no-death guarantee. So at least he realizes something. He does get a 10-year warranty on the steps. He figures the stonemason is good for it, because the stonemason is probably some kind of eternally recurring mythopoetic figure of some sort.

“And when the job is finished, the steps look just like they did before they started crumbling,” the fifth-to-

last sentence said.

“Yes,” the story agrees. “And when the wife comes home from the business trip she’s been on this whole time, she’s very happy that the narrator took care of the problem using his judgment and initiative. That’s a little bit of non-dark magic the stonemason throws in for good measure, just so there are no hard feelings.”

“And what happens to the author?” the author asked.

The sentences paused and leaned forward, as if italicized, to hear the story’s resolution.

“The author sold the story for \$2,200 to *Concrete Character*, a new and prestigious quarterly founded by an almost-billionaire who made a fortune in feldspar and now wants to give something back. The check was almost enough for the author to get his actual steps actually fixed.”

“Hah!” exclaimed the author. “As if that could ever happen.”

“You said you wanted fiction,” said the story.

And they all lived happily ever after, until the sequel.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Andrew Valencia

Two weeks before Vincent left home to spend a semester abroad in Paris, his cousin returned from Iraq badly wounded by a roadside bomb. The day before his flight, his grandfather was admitted into the hospital (and then quickly ejected right back out) because his diabetes was threatening to kill him (but could be managed at home with medication). In the hours preceding his departure, his mother got no sleep and seemed to live at the hospital. There was no question, at any point, of whether or not he would still go to Paris. He had already bought his ticket, and, what's more, this was the opportunity of his lifetime, as his mother told him. He left California six days after New Year's Day. There was snow on the ground when he arrived in Paris.

He spent three weeks feeling like the jetlag still hadn't worn off. He barely paid attention in classes, neglected to test his language skills with other students, and went straight home on the metro at the end of every day. Then, one afternoon, he got off the metro at Saint-Michel with the idea of taking a little walk. He stood outside the metro for quite a while staring at the statue on the fountain of Saint Michael. He liked the way the statue looked. An old man on the street passed by and commented on the statue, then walked away. Vincent stood a little longer and continued on his walk. None of the problems he had before the walk went away, but afterwards he felt better in spite of it all.

1:18 p.m., 13h18: Saint-Michel Metro Station. A sunless winter sky, the same shade of gray as the Archangel's wings. The city of Paris alive under its fixed gaze. Vincent reciprocated the gaze right back at it. The entire world was cold today. But back home in California it was warmer. Vincent's arm brushed against a stranger walking past. He liked the way the statue looked. But he didn't like the way it looked at him.

It's a fantastic statue, isn't it? The old man had come out of nowhere. Americans abroad cling to one another in the cold and pretend not to recognize one another on a sunny day.

Yes, it is, Vincent replied. The marks of age on what he could see of the old man's face brought up other visions. Tired joints struggling to carry a bent back across a hospital floor. Crooked blue veins bulging under the transparent flesh of a hand. The chorus of an old French song rang in his ear. *Non, je ne regrette rien*. He wasn't sure if he had regrets. But he had ample guilt.

What do the plaques commemorate? Commemoration. When would his cousin get commemoration, if ever? He hadn't been killed, after all. It's the corpses that make history, not the wounded. Vincent knew what history meant. Hastings, Waterloo, Bunker Hill, Omaha Beach. Joyce was right, and wrong. History is a nightmare. But you never wake up from it.

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

<< Page 2 of 2

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Apala

Jason Nemec

Maena

Susan Green

The Lonely Story

Mark Gozonsky

Home Improvements

Christine Meade

out back by the rabbit pen

Calder Lorenz

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms

Andrew Valencia

Art

French dead of World War II.

Ah.

After midnight, alongside a row of beds in the emergency room of the county hospital. His mother desperately berating the night doctor and his nurse for discharging his grandfather only hours after he had been admitted with life-threatening high blood sugar. A day’s starvation had brought it down to high normal, and they need him to free up the bed. His mother scratches her arms compulsively when she’s exasperated. His job: help his grandpa get his pants back on. Pale, saggy white thighs. Torn, saggy tighty-whites. Chapped old lips mumbling in dementia; empty threats of suing the whole goddamn hospital. At the airport, his mother’s impassioned plea. Have a great time abroad. Don’t let it ruin your trip. The first in our family to see Europe. Find joy abroad. I need to live through your joy right now.

Vincent saw the old man’s face through his hood as he nodded. He smiled before he walked away. He smiled cheerfully in the bitter cold. There was so much life in him yet.

VI

Early afternoon. Saint-Michel Place, Paris. A cold wind blows off and on. Vincent stands looking up at the statue on the Saint-Michel Fountain. He likes the way the statue looks. An old man enters.

Old Man: It’s a fantastic statue, isn’t it?

Vincent: Yes, it is.

Old Man: What do the plaques commemorate?

Vincent: French dead of World War II.

Old Man: Ah.

Exit the old man.

Exit Vincent.

End Scene



Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Mark Gozonsky

Mark Gozonsky lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two daughters. He has recently published fiction in *Two Hawks Quarterly*, and launched [markgozonsky.com](#).

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

The Lonely Story
Fiction

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[submissions](#)

[contributors](#)

[submission information](#)

[staff](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[issues](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners



Issue 11 Contributors

Andrew Valencia

Andrew Valencia is currently attending Stanford University. A native of the Central San Joaquin Valley, California, he has worked as a journalist, English teacher in South Korea, radio show interviewer, student peer mentor, and office assistant. His fiction has appeared in the Stanford literary magazine *Leland Quarterly*.

Christine Meade

Christine Meade lives in San Francisco and is pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing. Originally from Boston, she has worked as a reporter and teaches yoga and Pilates when not reading or writing.

Ken Rodgers

Ken Rodgers lives and writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry in Boise, Idaho. He and his wife, Betty, tend to be migrants if not vagrants. Ken teaches creative writing workshops on ground and online. Ken has an MFA in Creative Writing from The University of San Francisco (2000) where he had a hell of a good time. See more about Ken at www.kennethrodgers.com.

Chris Carosi

Chris Carosi is from Pittsburgh. He is currently studying at the University of San Francisco for an MFA degree in Poetry. He would like to dedicate "The Lonely Freedom" to his classmates and teachers.

Stephen Maurer

Stephen Maurer has practiced and written about psychoanalysis for over 20 years, most recently from a Lacanian perspective. Desire to immerse himself in poetry prompted partial retirement from Seattle to a small college town. He has published poetry in *Boston Lit. Magazine*, *Yale Journal of Humanities in Medicine*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Darkling*, *Blueprint Review*, *Desert Voices*, and *Switchback* (March 2010). He is a grandfather, and has a lifelong discipline as a classical clarinetist and outdoorsman. He lives with his wife Elizabeth (Chief Reader and Critic) and their dog Sombra. Stephen can be reached at espiritunaranjo@yahoo.com.

Maureen Alsop

Maureen Alsop is the author of two full collections of poetry, *Apparition Wren* (Main Street Rag) and *The Diction of Moths* (Ghost Road Press, pending). She is also the author of several chapbooks, most recently *Luminal Equation* in the collection *Narwhal* (Cannibal Press), *the dream and the dream you spoke* (Spire Press). She is the winner of *Harpur Palate's* Milton Kessler Memorial Prize for Poetry and *The Bitter Oleander's* Frances Locke Memorial Poetry Award. Her more recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in various journals including *Blackbird*, *AGNI*, *Tampa Review*, *Action Yes*, *Pank*, *Whiskey Island*, *qartsiluni*, *42 Opus*, and *Drunken Boat*.

Mark Boccard

Mark Boccard is a poet and musician living in Oakland. "The Moor Dances," which appears in issue 11 of *Switchback*, is part of a book-length project involving the translation of music from Stravinsky's ballet, *Petrushka*, into text. Mark is currently finishing an MFA in Poetry at Mills College.

Katharyn M. Browne

Katharyn M. Browne lives, reads, and writes in the Bay Area. She is currently finishing her MFA at USF.

Dunstan Christopher

Born in Detroit, Dunstan Christopher currently resides in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, where he wakes every morning to gaze wistfully at the Hollywood sign. His first chapbook, *Motives*, is being published this spring by the g.e. collective in collaboration with Poetry Flash. More of his writing, music, and visual work can be found at [Catastrophic Imagination](#).

Tray Drumhann

Tray Drumhann is a mixed media artist and photographer living and working in the southern United States. Tray Drumhann has exhibited his work in galleries throughout the world including exhibitions at the the Contemporary Art Center in London and the Bruckner Art Gallery gallery in New York. Notable publications featuring Drumhann's work include: The Pinch Journal, Tiferet and Sein Und Werden.

Artist's Statement:

Tray Drumhann's work explores the inter-dependency of the tangible upon the intangible; the product upon the process. Creating a work of art is the intangible process; a very personal intimate event of communication experienced by the artist alone. The finished work is the product, the tangible. A public statement, shared by both the artist and the viewer. Although the process seems able to stand alone on it's own merit, the product depends upon the process. In actuality the process also depends upon the product to give it meaning.

Manda Frederick

Manda Frederick is a small-town Midwestern girl who made her way to Washington state to pursue her MFA in creative nonfiction at the Inland Northwest Center for Writers at Eastern Washington University. When she isn't essaying or writing to pen pals, she writes weekly poetry reviews for [poetrynight.org](#), a nonprofit group that diffuses poetry through the Northwest. She currently studies literature and teaches at Western Washington University where she also works for the Bellingham Review.

Mark Gozonsky

Mark Gozonsky lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two daughters. He has recently published fiction in *Two Hawks Quarterly*, and launched [markgozonsky.com](#).

Martha Grover

Martha Grover attends the California College of Arts in the Creative Writing Master's Program. Her work has appeared in Eye-Rhyme, The Raven Chronicles and 400 Words. She has been publishing the zine Somnambulist for five years.

Surya Kalsi

I have previously published poetry. I am currently an MFA aspiring novelist at USF. My work blends style with substance, shining a light on the dark places of the human heart.

Artist's Statement:

Caribbean. August 2009. Under a blazing sun, I veered away from the tourist shops finding myself in the city. Hunting. Turning down a sun drenched street I discovered a conversation in stone--dilapidated courtyards with pockmarked limestone, rusted wrought iron gates protecting nothing but weeds sprouting from cracked tiles. It was St. Thomas: colloquial, uncompromising, processed by the salt heavy air, hurricanes and time. Colors leapt. Walls crimson and violet, loden and mustard, glutinous paint shredded by seasons. It was St. Thomas. Ruined. Neglected. Time worn and heavy with the memory of its past. Yet beautiful in its decay.

Calder Lorenz

Calder Lorenz currently works at [St. Anthony's Dining Room](#) in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. In December 2009 he finished his MFA in Writing at the University of San Francisco and is in the process of completing his first novel.

In the fall of 2009, two pieces of his flash fiction and an interview were published on the California literature site, [Curly Red Stories](#).

Susan Green

Susan Green is a Chicago native with a B.A. in Philosophy from Stanford and little else. This is her first publication.

Chris Malcomb

Chris Malcomb's essays have appeared in *The San Francisco Chronicle Magazine*, *Teachers & Writers*, *Common Ground*, and *The Sun*. He currently teaches Mindfulness & Creative Writing workshops in Berkeley, CA.

Jason Nemec

Jason Nemec's poetry has appeared in *Meridian*, *Rattle*, *Controlled Burn*, *Nimrod*, on the web at *Verse Daily* and *storySouth*, and in various other publications. He is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Cincinnati, where he is at work on a novel. "Apala" is his first published story.

Jami Proctor-Xu

Jami Proctor-Xu is a poet, translator, mother, and scholar. She lives in Beijing, where she is a visiting scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Eric Rawson

Eric Rawson lives in Los Angeles. His book *The Hummingbird Hour* will be published in 2010.

Cedar Sigo

Cedar Sigo is 32 years old and moved to San Francisco in 1999. His books include *Goodnight Nurse*, *Thank you Letters*, two editions of *Selected Writings* (UDP) *Expensive Magic*, and most recently a book of drawings, *Portraits*. *Stranger In Town* is forthcoming from City Lights Books in Fall 2010.

Jennifer Skogen

Jennifer Skogen is a recent graduate from University of San Francisco's MFA in Writing Program and lives on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. She currently splits her time between thinking deep, serious thoughts about poetry, and reading too many YA fantasy novels.

Adam Strauss

Adam Strauss has poems out in *Fact-Simile* and *Fence*, and will soon be a featured Artist on the [Tusculum Review](#) website. "Atomic Gardening" is from a manuscript titled *Braided Sand*.

Wendy Sumner-Winter

Wendy Sumner-Winter was a chef, restaurant owner, legal assistant, nanny, art gallery owner, bartender, fundraiser, dancer and singer - all before the age of thirty, at which time she decided to try out school for a while. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Pinch*, *Word Riot*, *Fertile Ground*, *The Missouri Review*, and *Fourth Genre*. She lives, writes and teaches in Memphis with her family of two red-headed humans and two silly dogs.

Andrew Topel

Andrew Topel has often been brief.

Artist's Statement:

process vs. product - process is what intrigues me - at times i can envision the final product, but i much prefer to be surprised by the outcome & get immersed in different paths of exploration. it's interesting that the word versus is used here - i don't see them opposed to each other.

Christopher Woods

Christopher Woods is a writer, photographer and teacher. He lives in Houston and in Chappell Hill, Texas. His work has appeared recently in *Glasgow Review*, *Litchfield Review* and *Narrative Magazine*. His books include a prose collection, *Under a Riverbed Sky*, and a book of stage monologues for actors, *Heart Speak*. He shares an online gallery with his wife Linda at [Moonbird Hill Arts](#).

Artist's Statement:

What often interests me is the mysterious nature of landscapes and architecture. Much of my work is from a rural area in southeast Texas that was home to slaves, plantations and even a Union soldier POW camp. I keep this in my mind as I take photographs. Landscapes and old buildings have long memories. I try to capture the spirit of those memories. I think of it as a kind of duty.

ali lanzetta

ali lanzetta is a linguistic, visual and musical artist, living in San Francisco. She holds a BA in Studio Art, an MA in English, and is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing, at San Francisco State University. ali's work has appeared in *Transfer*, *Hunger Mountain* and *Verse*, and her writing, music and book art have been featured at various creative venues around the city. ali was born with the sun in Scorpio. she is enamored with giraffes, whose hearts are over two feet long. to read more of ali's work, please visit her online writing space, [makeshift whimsy](#).

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#) [contributors](#) [staff](#) [issues](#) [comments](#) [links](#)
[submission information](#) [email the webmaster](#) [email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Staff

Editors:

Kelci Baughman McDowell a.k.a. **Kelci M. Kelci** (Managing Editor) is a graduate of USF's MFA in Writing program. She is still working on a poetry manuscript entitled *52 Sundays* but mostly spends her time dreaming of the ideal accordion-fold book to build from scraps of fine Japanese paper. She's also quite frequently rejected by various respected literary magazines. Check out her blog: <http://kmbm23.blogspot.com>

Colin Bean (Tech Editor) is currently pursuing an MS in Computer Science at USF and working on his multitasking skills.

Stephen Beachy (Faculty Advisor) is the author of two novels, *The Whistling Song* and *Distortion*, and most recently the novellas *Some Phantom* and *No Time Flat*. *Distortion* will be reissued any day now by Rebel Satori Press. He has been teaching at USF since 1999. Check out his website: <http://www.livingliely.com>

Founders:

Rosita Nunes (Founding Editor), a graduate of the USF MFA in Writing Program, has always had a hand in startups, transitions and turnarounds. She has held many titles over the years, and this one is among the best. Switchback is a project to be proud of, thanks to a continuing flow of talent coming together to bring it life with each issue.

Alex Davis (Co-Founding Editor) has an MFA in Writing from the University of San Francisco. His poems have been published in *Five Fingers Review*. He has a tattoo with hidden meaning.

Associate Editors:

Karen Biscopink is a first year MFA student studying poetry. File-folder alphabetizer by day and folk-singer by night, Karen enjoys searching for the perfect plate of macaroni and cheese. She collects zines and mixtapes made by/for other people. Karen hopes to someday participate in the SF roller derby using the name "Sylvia Wrath."

Carlos Cabrera was born and raised in Los Angeles and is never, ever going back there.

Jorge Cino has been a conflicted Argentinean expat since 2004, and that is all you need to know, for now.

Margaret LaFleur is a temp by day and a student/writer by night, though this is hopefully subject to change. She recently claimed her domain name (margaretlafleur.com) but doesn't suggest you visit unless you need another source of cat photos and random YouTube videos.

Jacques Li is an MFA student at USF who is studying nonfiction.

Libby McDonnell often comes up with fabulously witty retorts several seconds too late. This is probably why she writes. She is a second year master's student in poetry at USF.



Yet Beautiful in its Decay
Surya Kalsi

Nicole McFadden obtained a BA in English Literature from the University of Oregon, where she served as a poetry editor for the Northwest Review. She graduated from USF’s MFA in Writing Program in December, completing a memoir called *In the Middle of the Street*. She has taught English as a Second Language in Japan, Spain, India, and San Francisco. Nicole published an article about teaching around the world in *The CATESOL News*. She currently works in educational publishing.

Alex Nemick is a first year MFA student at USF studying poetry. He has recently moved to San Francisco from Colorado and is wondering what happened to the other three seasons.

Keith J. Powell is a first year MFA student and Ohio native. Some of the publications to carry his work include *Harcourt Textbooks*, *the BG News*, *Popular Press*, *Dramatics Magazine*, and [Playscripts.com](#). He is the co-host of the Unshow.

[All Current & Former Staff](#)

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

on his face as she looked demurely into her bouquet. Her profile from only a year and a half ago looked younger, pretty; slim nose, carefully curled eyelashes and painted lips. How long could she keep aging forward as he moved in reverse?

She wanted to crawl back into the basement as soon as she left it. She planned to jump rope for 15 minutes and then finish and submit her article. She saved writing her own headlines for the end.

He gazed out the window at the bare trees. The Wednesday paper had slipped to the floor. He had read an entire library of books over the past six months. Her parents bought him a Nintendo Wii to keep him occupied. He had stared at the white controls in his hands, helplessly watching his animated self play tennis for nearly a round before he threw the controller and started weeping. She never cried.

“Honey.” He smiled when he saw her.

His soft curls looked nearly girlish in the forgiving afternoon sun of the bay window. He was months overdue for a cut. If she never cleaned the window and never cut his hair, how long would the curls grow?

“Come sit, pretty.”

Shocked by his strength, he lifted her by the waist and sat her on his lap. Reaching a hand behind her head, he pulled her face down to his and he smelled of breakfast—eggs with sour cream and coffee with soap. He kissed her carefully at first, as if his lips expected a retraction. Then he covered her mouth with his. Being turned on surprised her and she leaned into him, one hand on his chest over his heart of flannel.

“You forgot to tell me what you wanted to talk to me about,” he said. She wanted to kiss him again. She was still attracted to this man, her husband, which made it all the worse.

She paused, turning her question sideways and upside down. Its edges never smoothed, never the right time, and so she tucked it back.

“I was thinking I wanted to re-do the back porch. Make it a three-season porch or a sunroom. That way you can sit out there and I can work out there, instead of just deserting it until summer.”

“What do you mean re-do it? I just built it a year ago.” She knew she shouldn’t have said anything. His cheeks sagged and his smile dropped into a pout.

“But I was thinking of replacing the screens with big windows. Maybe we could heat the room and add a door to the yard. It’d be really nice.” His eyes pinched at the corners. It happened so easily now—crying over a misspoken word, a spilled glass of wine, not being able to reach the cat.

“How are you going to do all that without me?” They asked each other the question hundreds of times since the accident. D looked down at his legs, now strands of spaghetti. She tried to get the tune of his shattering pelvis from tinkering in her inner ear. She couldn’t wrap her mind around the fact that it had been only six months since D stood between two cars, only three blocks away from home. On their walk back from the cool-down portion of their run, he teased her for slowing him down as she bent at the sidewalk to tie a wayward lace. She didn’t look up until she heard the crunch, like her grandfather with his fake teeth biting into a Ritz cracker. A bumper and a fender bit her husband in half, his eyes on her the entire time.

If only the other girl two cars up had been a better parallel parker. If only the driving school had been more diligent in her training. If only she had had her license for longer than a few months. If only if only if only. If only his eyes hadn’t stayed on his wife for the whole time, not even blinking at the sound. They expanded into orbs and moons and then entire planets until they both collapsed.

If only flannel and warm kisses and soapy coffee were enough to keep any woman happy with a man, only 29, stuck in a wheel chair for the rest of his life. They were lucky, they should be lucky. His entire body wasn’t paralyzed, but would it have made a difference?

She kissed him again and laid her head on his shoulder. He raked a hand through her hair. She hadn’t

cut hers in months either. Maybe they were growing into the same person, with girlish hair and skinny legs. Joined at the hipNone with feeling and one without.

“Okay,” he said.

“We can eat ice cream sundaes for supper tonight. Like we used to.” Nesting his head in the crook of her neck, he gurgled softly. She glanced back towards the sunroomNone long rays through large windows, fresh flowers, and spring air through the open doorNone and pulled the quilted blanket higher up over both of their legs.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [staff](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [issues](#)
- [comments](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

Christine Meade

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Home Improvements
Fiction

Christine Meade lives in San Francisco and is pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing. Originally from Boston, she has worked as a reporter and teaches yoga and Pilates when not reading or writing.

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)

[contributors](#)

[submission information](#)

[staff](#)

[issues](#)

[email the webmaster](#)

[comments](#)

[links](#)

[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

home

issues

contributors

submissions

staff

comments

video

links

out back by the rabbit pen

Calder Lorenz

Alias awoke to the sound of rusted brakes. The bus lurched as it crawled like a tank over the curb of an empty desert gas station.

ÒPardon me,Ó he said to the woman next to him. ÒWhere are we?Ó

ÒEastern, Eastern Washington,Ó she said flatly.

Her face blotched and tired. Her blonde hair tied back. Her arms were bare and freckled, as brittle as a dead branch.

ÒYouÖd rather be somewhere else?Ó she asked.

The familiarity of this new space horrified him. The town looked as exciting as the one heÖd left for good.

Southern Oregon, Medford. Methford.

The woman stood and removed her belongings from the overhead bin. She leaned towards him.

ÒYou snore,Ó she said. ÒIn your sleep.Ó

She said, ÒAinÖt no one gonna share a bed with you if you donÖt get that fixed.Ó

She smiled a bright tight smile that shook him up.

ÒSorry,Ó he said, unsure of what else to say.

"We all got flaws,Ó she said.

ÒÖm pretty sure,Ó he said.

ÒDid you sleep the entire way?Ó

ÒÖm pretty sure,Ó he said.

ÒÖd thought about waking you at the last gas station. We all ate sandwiches at the sandwich shop, but the heat got the best of me.Ó She hiked up two large suitcases as if they were a pair of loose pants. The worn skin of the cases peeled out from the dried and cracked corners. ÒIf you walk past the bookstore, you can get a bite to eat at my sonÖs diner.Ó

He bought a pouch of rolling tobacco at the gas station. On the register there was a laminated sun bleached sign that read, America still Open for Business. He figured that the man behind the counter with tobacco streaks in his teeth had made the amendment.

She waited for him on the corner. They walked past the bookstore and the woman paused. Her shoulders dipped with the weight of the suitcases and lines of sweat ran into her dyed eyebrows. She was incredibly thin with a frame that would have easily supported more. The bookstoreÖs front door was closed and blocked by a wooden bin. A small printed sign read, *Free Books*.

ÒThatÖs DonnieÖs,Ó she said, puffing up at her thin curled bangs. ÒDonÖt listen to a word that boy says. I told him a bookstore is something. Maybe not even that bad of an investment. But, hell, a Christian bookstore. WhoÖll buy more than two bibles?Ó

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work

Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Apala
Jason Nemec

Maena
Susan Green

The Lonely Story
Mark Gozonsky

Home Improvements
Christine Meade

out back by the rabbit pen
Calder Lorenz

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms
Andrew Valencia

Art

Alias had once imagined owning his own space while he was in Seattle. He'd have liked to have nothing to do but serve up cold drinks, talk to friends about music and books. He'd play his guitar for folks on a small stage. Everyday filled with certainty. Faces you knew, people you liked to please.

ÒMaybe, it's not such a bad idea,Ó he said. ÒI know a few people who'd buy more than two.Ó

He thought of his tall, athletic uncle down there in Central Florida, a minister with sculpted hair that could withstand hurricane strength winds. Sculpted calves that supported tan pressed shorts. He thought of his grandmother's funeral, the last time the entire family had gathered together. How he'd seen no one since. How his aunt, her makeup-riddled face as tight as plastic, her alien voice speaking in tongues, danced about the stage. His Catholic grandmother, in her best green dress, dead on St. Patrick's Day, luck of the Irish, who sent him a birthday card for every year of his life, pronounced a sinner before god and the humidity of March. Sinner! boomed from the church's surround sound system and off the screened windows and into the raised casket. The entire family trapped like bugs in an electric zapper.

ÒDo they live around here?Ó the woman asked.

ÒNo,Ó he said. ÒThey don't.Ó

ÒThat's right,Ó she said. ÒThey don't.Ó

Alias's lower back itched as his shirt stuck to his skin. He suddenly felt taxed by the heat. He needed a cold drink. There was a thin breeze but it was as refreshing as a blowdryer. A plastic bag tumbled at their feet and then danced like a mosquito around one of the store's dust-caked windows.

The diner was empty and Donnie, his cotton blue shirt stained at the ampits, poured Alias a glass of water with no ice.

ÒMachines broken,Ó he said. ÒSorry about that.Ó

ÒDo you have anything cold?Ó Alias asked. ÒCereal or something.Ó

ÒWe can make eggs any way you like em, or pancakes,Ó he said. ÒSorry about that.Ó

Donnie's mother lounged in one of the booths with her bare feet propped up. She fanned herself with a folded paper plate. She read from a magazine.

Donnie stood behind the counter with a rag wrapped around his hands, his large curly black hair like a protective helmet. He looked expectantly at his mother. She went right on reading.

Donnie fumbled around in the kitchen. He brought out a burned frying pan. Threw in half a stick of butter.

ÒCan I catch a bus later today?Ó Alias asked.

"Tomorrow morning,Ó the woman answered. ÒWhere are you supposed to be?Ó

ÒThought I'd head on down to California. Thought I'd try out San Francisco.Ó

ÒShould've taken the coast if you wanted to get down to San Francisco,Ó Donnie said. ÒNow you'll really have to go way out of your way. Back to Pasco or somewhere near the border with Oregon.Ó

ÒI'm not worried,Ó Alias said. ÒI'm trying out new routes. Quieter ones.Ó

ÒI guess you're right,Ó Donnie said. ÒI bet the ocean can be as loud as a son of a bitch.Ó

Donnie stirred the butter around the pan. He pulled a small container from a tray next to the grill and poured out a thick liquid. The pan sizzled.

ÒLooks like you'll be here for the night then,Ó Donnie said. ÒYou know I could use some help with this new venture I'm getting off the ground.Ó

A chuckle came from behind the magazine in the booth.

ÒIt's a good idea mom,Ó Donnie said. He bent his head towards the pan and scratched his knee with his warped spatula.

“What’s the plan,” he said to Donnie. “Let me hear it.”

“It’s real simple.” Donnie waved his spatula like a conductor. “I’ve got a van. And in a few hours, the last bus will arrive from Seattle. There’s a concert up the road tonight. It’s a good walk to the venue where the kids all camp, like five miles. Some kids will walk it but most just try and hitch rides. It’s still kind of hot after the sun goes down. So, I figure why not be waiting for them when they get off the bus. We can tie their stuff to the roof and fit maybe six or seven kids in there. Sell them a few cold drinks. Charge them a good rate. Plus, we can try and sell them some of the items I got in my bookstore.”

Donnie’s mother slapped her magazine against the table.

“No kids would want to buy those damn religious books,” she said. “Get some sense in your head.”

Donnie turned back to flip the pancakes. He lowered his head.

Alias thought the boy might start to cry but he just went right on pushing the cakes around the pan.

They had made a deal. Alias would drive and Donnie, who was well on his way, would continue to drink. They pulled into the gas station and parked next to a broken down gas pump. The light was off in the service office. Donnie’s van had no radio just red and blue and green wires that extended out stiffly in every direction.

“Want a beer?” Donnie asked.

Alias snapped a beer from the six-pack. Donnie drank his beer fast. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and then cracked another.

“It’s cool to have a couple of beers and drive. There’s only one cop on duty here at night and he’s down the road at Ralphs waiting for the drunks.”

“Don’t people know that he’s waiting for them?”

“Sure,” Donnie said with a wide grin. “They aren’t stupid, just having a little fun. The cop, Ken, he’s younger than me and most of the folks would have taught him in school or sold his parents groceries or umpired for his t-ball team. No, no, his job is to escort them home with his lights on so they don’t hurt anyone or drive off into a pile of rocks. That’s why they leave in shifts. Cuss him, make a show of it and then they pretend they’re out on their own like he’s not there, in total control of the situation.”

Over the course of a few hours, Donnie had polished off nine or ten beers. But, he’d also managed to convince twelve kids to catch a ride to the concert, sold four cold soft drinks from the cooler in the back of the van and even found a home for three pornographic magazines he’d brought from his bookstore. He had business cards ready when they collected their belongings. In all he’d netted about seventy-five dollars.

He was passed out on a cot in the bookstore when Alias walked into the diner. Donnie’s mother was still reading in one of the booths.

“Shut that door tight,” she said from behind her magazine. “My blanket is in the house.”

Alias turned the lock on the glass door.

“You can flip the sign. We’re closed.”

“Can I buy something to drink?” he asked.

“Help yourself,” she said. “There’s a cooler around the counter.” She lowered the magazine.

“Officially,” she said with a sordid smile, “it’s after hours. So it’s free.”

Alias found the cooler and picked out the coldest bottle he could find. He stood behind the counter and drank.

Donnie’s mother sat down on a stool across from him.

“You got a purpose?” she asked. “Do you love something?”

“I play guitar,” he said. “That’s about all. But I screwed that up.”

“One more thing than my boy can do,” she said. She laughed but it was soft and abrupt.

“I don’t know about that,” Alias said. “He did pretty good tonight. He wants to drive me to the border with some of the money he made.”

“I didn’t say he wasn’t good natured.”

Alias walked back around. Sat at the rounded end of the counter near the door.

She untied her hair and pulled it back tight. Pressed her bangs flat. She pulled lipstick from her pocket and drew it around her lips as slow as the desert dusk fades to dark and stars.

“Let’s make ourselves a deal,” she said.

Alias stayed quiet.

“Donnie gets these wild ideas in his head,” she said. “California will sound like nothing that’s ever touched his big ears. But there ain’t nothing there for him. Ain’t nothing there for you in case you haven’t heard the good word. But, that’s for you to figure out. So, I’m going to show you something special and you can have a taste of it and when it comes time, I want my boy back.”

Alias popped his knuckles.

They walked together behind the diner out across the dry ground of her backyard. On a hillside off in the distance, light burned from a cross the size of a phone tower. Near the edge of a shed he could make out small dark lumps huddled together in a pen. His eyes adjusted with the help of the stars and as they grew closer he realized they were rabbits, a few hopping to greet them.

She opened the door to the shed. Flipped on the light and led him by the hand inside.

And there above him, hung from the shed’s metal roof like varnished stalactites, were an assortment of guitars unlike anything he’d ever seen. There was a small couch and an amp and a table with an ashtray.

Twenty, thirty, hand crafted guitars: a banjo, a twelve string, steel and wood, a double neck.

The instruments filling the silent space like moss on a tree.

“We got a deal?” she asked.

“I’m pretty sure,” he said.



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
- [staff](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [issues](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Calder Lorenz

Calder Lorenz currently works at [St. Anthony's Dining Room](#) in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. In December 2009 he finished his MFA in Writing at the University of San Francisco and is in the process of completing his first novel.

In the fall of 2009, two pieces of his flash fiction and an interview were published on the California literature site, [Curly Red Stories](#).

Calder Lorenz

Calder Lorenz currently works at [St. Anthony's Dining Room](#) in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. In December 2009 he finished his MFA in Writing at the University of San Francisco and is in the process of completing his first novel.

In the fall of 2009, two pieces of his flash fiction and an interview were published on the California literature site, [Curly Red Stories](#).

Calder Lorenz

Calder Lorenz currently works at [St. Anthony's Dining Room](#) in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. In December 2009 he finished his MFA in Writing at the University of San Francisco and is in the process of completing his first novel.

In the fall of 2009, two pieces of his flash fiction and an interview were published on the California literature site, [Curly Red Stories](#).

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms

Andrew Valencia

Vincent had been in Paris for three weeks. He stood outside the Saint-Michel Metro station looking up at the statue at the top of the fountain of Saint Michael. He liked the way the statue looked. As he stood reading the stone plaques beneath it, an old man passing by stopped beside him.

“It’s a fantastic statue, isn’t it?” the old man said.

“Yes, it is,” Vincent replied. His mind was distracted. There was a lot to think over.

“What do the plaques commemorate?” the old man asked him.

“French dead of World War II.”

“Ah,” the old man replied. He nodded slightly and then walked away.

Vincent looked at the fountain a little longer, and then walked away himself. Somewhere in the city there was joy to be found.

The statue of Saint Michael glared down at Vincent, its faceÑcold, dark bronze with an aura, or halo perhaps, of animationÑlooking serene and calm even in the face of immeasurable victory. The Archangel stood triumphant with his bare foot planted on the back of the Great Renegade while below the water sat tepid and still, unfed by either of the lion-headed dragons at the sides of the fountain.

Taking a moment to examine the fountain brought a sense of alertness to Vincent, who had been walking inattentively and decidedly not-like-a-tourist since he left his host family's apartment that morning. He liked the way the statue at the top looked. They didn't have anything like it in California, despite the attempts of many to try to replicate the old world. The aspects he admired the most were those that had been sculpted by time—the pigeon shit crowning the head of Lucifer, the faded tiles where the water would be flowing, the dark algae tracing their borders. There's nothing like time for creating nostalgia and then converting it into mournful beauty. Only distance can rival it.

A stranger brushed past Vincent's arm as he hurried towards the metro station to the side of the fountain. It was the early afternoon. The streets were busy and Vincent was in the way of things. From each of the converging streets poured an influx of locals as well as foreigners, recognizable by the way they stopped to take pictures of everything and devoured kebobs while walking on the street. Vincent was one of them too now! Na, a foreigner, a stranger in this land.

As he stood reading the plaques, an old man who had been walking by stopped a few feet next to him. He was dressed in a heavily padded coat that seemed excessive even for the Paris winter. The hood was pulled up and through it Vincent could see a long nose poking out between two thick glass frames. The face it belonged to was very pale and red from the cold.

“It’s a fantastic statue, isn’t it?” the old man said. Vincent recognized his accent as American

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

[<Previous Work](#) [Next Work >](#)

Page 1 of 2 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Apala
Jason Nemec

Maena
Susan Green

The Lonely Story
Mark Gozonsky

Home Improvements

Christine Meade

Calder Lorenz

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms

Andrew Valencia

Art

instantly. How the old man had recognized him was uncertain. Usually it's only the rest of the world who can see us for what we are.

“Yes, it is,” Vincent replied.

The old man smiled and rubbed his hands together vigorously. The French never smile at strangers; Americans smile compulsively at everyone. How often do faces really convey the truth?

“What do the plaques commemorate?” the old man asked.

“French dead of World War II.” Vincent had blurted the answer out rather casually. He could afford to be casual about the war with a fellow American, even one who was old enough to have memories of what it had been like to live through it. The war belonged to Vincent as much as anyone. Memories fade easily, but images are immortal. And he had the same images of the war as any American. Pearl Harbor. Iwo Jima. Tom Hanks storming Omaha Beach. Cast them in white marble and erect them in every city—monuments to our last true moment with our foot on the back of the Devil. Somewhere in America, a cousin he barely knew was nursing his wounds in a crowded VA hospital, courtesy of an Iraqi roadside bomb.

“Ah,” the old man said, and nodded contentedly. He seemed to wait for Vincent to say something else, and then, finding he had nothing more to offer, turned and walked towards the metro.

Vincent watched the figure of the old man descend down the steps into the tunnel below. He was not a vigorous old man and there was a limp to his walk. It was dangerous for him to be out in the cold, for him to be taking those steps. If he did fall or get sick, Vincent considered, it would be better for it to happen in France than back in the US. His own grandfather was not so lucky. Neither was his cousin. The whole world was piled with the dead and the infirm. And Vincent here in Paris. Here, trying to find some kind of joy in all this.

He stood for some time more gazing up at the statue of the Archangel before turning and walking away. A dry freezing wind rushed over his face.

III

Vincent stood before the Archangel Michael at the intersection of two busy Paris streets. He liked the way the statue at the top looked. But the Archangel's stoic face seemed to conceal a far less angelic message. Vincent could hear the angel calling on him—“Submit! Submit, mortal, to the will of God!”

It was a sin for him to be here in Paris, under the guise of someone who could afford to travel widely abroad as a student of the world, when back home in the real world it was still the Winter of Despair. His cousin wounded from war. His grandfather in the hospital. His mother working herself ragged to keep the family afloat. All the money he had now he owed to the university.

“The Lord God is the same God of financial aid,” the Archangel said. “The same God of diabetes and of roadside bombs. He giveth and He taketh away.”

A stranger brushed past Vincent's arm and he barely noticed. What does the Bible say about joy? It is a gift for those who have faith. A lot of good that did Vincent, a nonbeliever. And yet he still felt humbled and terrified by depictions of angels and demons. The power of the deity never leaves the images of its acolytes, even when the deity itself is gone.

“You cannot escape judgment,” said the Archangel. “You ran from it in America, but you shall find it in France just as well.”

An old man stopped on the street beside him. He was very pale and he had his hood pulled over his head with the chords fastened tightly—the Angel of Death? No, not for him. Just for the rest of the world. The old man remarked about how fantastic the statue was.

“Yes, it is,” Vincent replied. Fantastic is a good word. It conveys impressiveness and fictitiousness at the

same time. Vincent could tell the Archangel was not pleased with the old man’s choice of words.

“What do the plaques commemorate?” the old man asked.

“The ground you walk on is saturated with the blood of martyrs,” the Archangel reminded Vincent.

“When they were your age they gave their lives for something bigger than themselves. But you can’t deal with anything bigger than yourself. You couldn’t face sorrow at home, and now you can find no real joy abroad.”

Vincent turned to look at the old man. “French dead of World War II,” he answered.

“Ah.” The old man nodded. His red cheeks were chapped from the cold and flakes of dead skin hung from his face. And he was a very old man. Vincent wished that he would be okay in the cold.

“The Lord taketh when and where He sees fit,” the stubborn Archangel reminded him.

The old man walked off towards the metro station. Just then the wind began to pick up. Vincent could feel a cruel angel’s wings at work. He lingered a little longer, then fastened his scarf and headed down the street alone. When will the prodigal son return?



Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

- [home](#)
[submission information](#)
- [contributors](#)
[email the webmaster](#)
- [staff](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [issues](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [comments](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)
- [links](#)
[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Andrew Valencia

Andrew Valencia is currently attending Stanford University. A native of the Central San Joaquin Valley, California, he has worked as a journalist, English teacher in South Korea, radio show interviewer, student peer mentor, and office assistant. His fiction has appeared in the Stanford literary magazine *Leland Quarterly*.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

Saint-Michel: A Moment in Six Forms
Fiction

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#) [contributors](#) [staff](#) [issues](#) [comments](#) [links](#)
[submission information](#) [email the webmaster](#) [email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Elements

[Tray Drumhann](#)



SHARE

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

[<Previous Work](#) [Next Work >](#)

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Rain Day
[Christopher Woods](#)

From the Lookout
[Christopher Woods](#)

Elements
[Tray Drumhann](#)

The Sun
[Andrew Topel](#)

A Woman's Best Friend
[Andrew Topel](#)

Excerpts from *Letters Patterns Structures*
[Andrew Topel](#)

Yet Beautiful in its Decay
[Surya Kalsi](#)

Window with Clouds
[Christopher Woods](#)

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

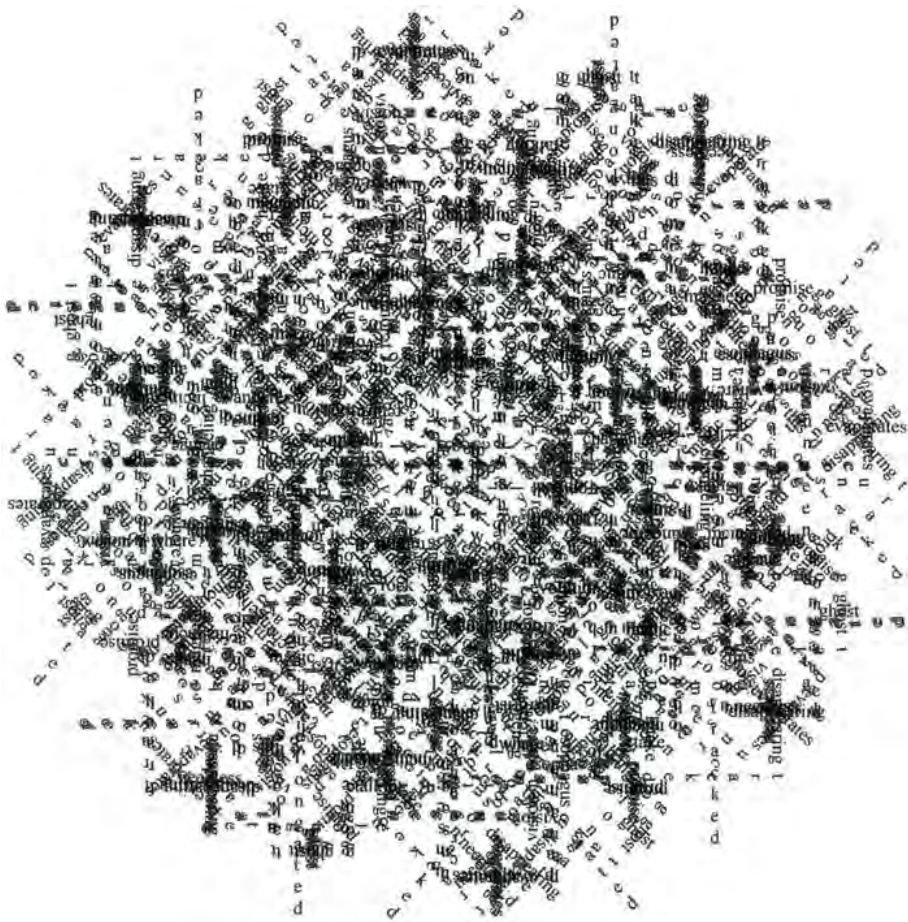
[home](#)[contributors](#)[staff](#)[issues](#)[comments](#)[links](#)

[submission information](#)[email the webmaster](#)[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

The Sun

[Andrew Topel](#)



[+](#) SHARE

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

[<Previous Work](#) [Next Work >](#)

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

[Rain Day](#)
Christopher Woods

[From the Lookout](#)
Christopher Woods

[Elements](#)
Tray Drumhann

[The Sun](#)
Andrew Topel

[A Woman's Best Friend](#)
Andrew Topel

[Excerpts from Letters Patterns Structures](#)
Andrew Topel

[Yet Beautiful in its Decay](#)
Surya Kalsi

[Window with Clouds](#)
Christopher Woods

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#)[contributors](#)[staff](#)[issues](#)[comments](#)[links](#)

[submission information](#)[email the webmaster](#)[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

New Issue 13: Intuition vs. Logic

Andrew Topel

Andrew Topel has often been brief.

Artist's Statement:
process vs. product - process is what intrigues me - at times i can envision the final product, but i much prefer to be surprised by the outcome & get immersed in different paths of exploration. it's interesting that the word versus is used here - i don't see them opposed to each other.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 11: Process vs. Product

The Sun
Art

A Woman's Best Friend

Art

Excerpts from *Letters Patterns Structures*
Art

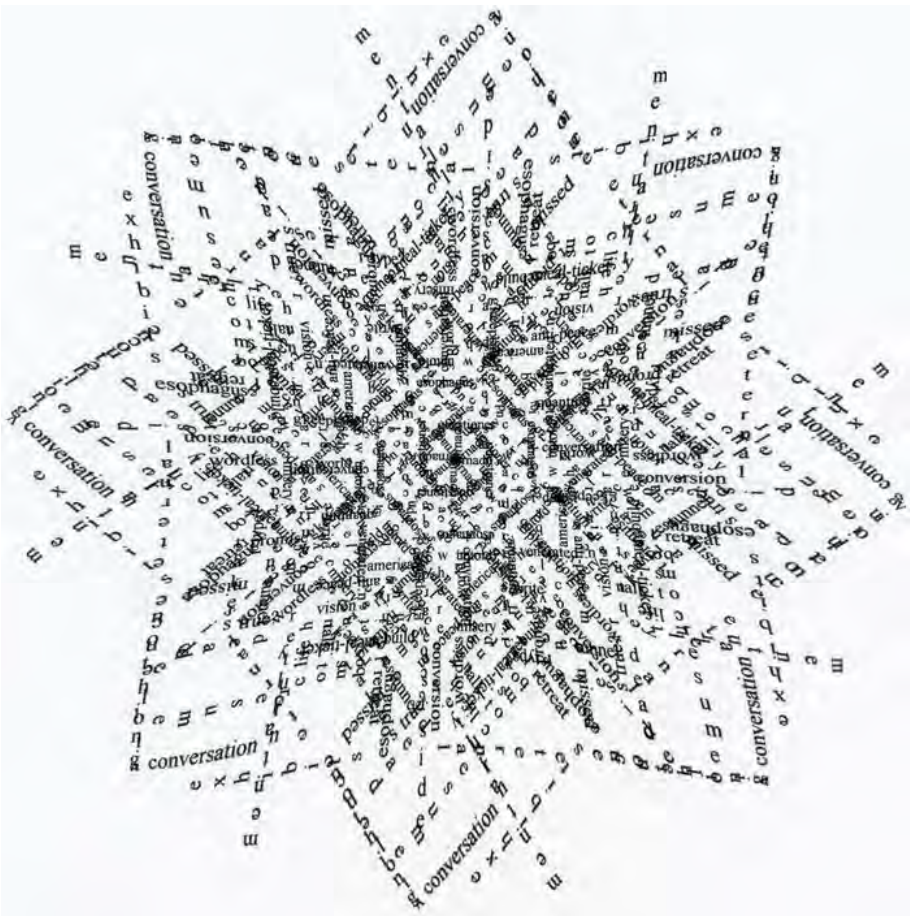
Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

[home](#) [contributors](#) [staff](#) [issues](#) [comments](#) [links](#)
[submission information](#) [email the webmaster](#) [email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

A Woman's Best Friend

[Andrew Topel](#)



[+](#) SHARE

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work	Next Work >
Nonfiction	
Poetry	
Fiction	
Art	

Rain Day
[Christopher Woods](#)

From the Lookout
[Christopher Woods](#)

Elements
[Tray Drumhann](#)

The Sun
[Andrew Topel](#)

A Woman's Best Friend
[Andrew Topel](#)

Excerpts from *Letters Patterns Structures*
[Andrew Topel](#)

Yet Beautiful in its Decay
[Surya Kalsi](#)

Window with Clouds
[Christopher Woods](#)

Switchback is a publication of the [Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco](#)

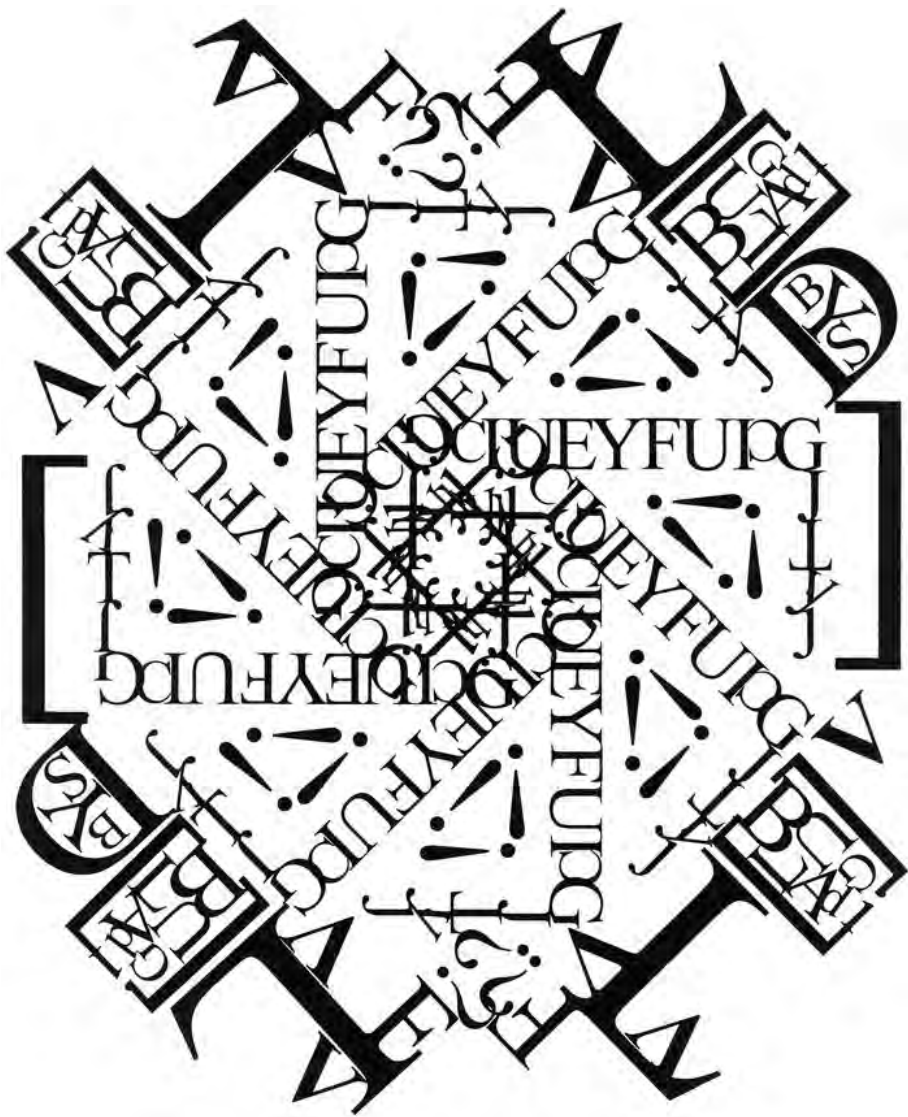
[home](#)[contributors](#)[staff](#)[issues](#)[comments](#)[links](#)

[submission information](#)[email the webmaster](#)[email comments to the editors](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Excerpts from *Letters Patterns Structures*

[Andrew Topel](#)



Issue 11
Process vs. Product
Spring 2010

<Previous Work	Next Work >
Page 1 of 4 >>	
Nonfiction	
Poetry	
Fiction	
Art	

- [Rain Day](#)
[Christopher Woods](#)
- [From the Lookout](#)
[Christopher Woods](#)
- [Elements](#)
[Tray Drumhann](#)
- [The Sun](#)
[Andrew Topel](#)
- [A Woman's Best Friend](#)
[Andrew Topel](#)
- [Excerpts from *Letters Patterns Structures*](#)
[Andrew Topel](#)
- [Yet Beautiful in its Decay](#)
[Surya Kalsi](#)
- [Window with Clouds](#)
[Christopher Woods](#)

Yet Beautiful in its Decay

[Surya Kalsi](#)



SHARE

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work	Next Work >
Nonfiction	
Poetry	
Fiction	
Art	
Rain Day Christopher Woods	
From the Lookout Christopher Woods	
Elements Tray Drumhann	
The Sun Andrew Topel	
A Woman's Best Friend Andrew Topel	
Excerpts from <i>Letters Patterns Structures</i> Andrew Topel	
Yet Beautiful in its Decay Surya Kalsi	
Window with Clouds Christopher Woods	

Window with Clouds

[Christopher Woods](#)



[+](#) SHARE [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [...](#)

Issue 11
Process vs. Product

Spring 2010

<Previous Work	Next Work >
Nonfiction	
Poetry	
Fiction	
Art	
Rain Day Christopher Woods	
From the Lookout Christopher Woods	
Elements Tray Drumhann	
The Sun Andrew Topel	
A Woman's Best Friend Andrew Topel	
Excerpts from <i>Letters Patterns Structures</i> Andrew Topel	
Yet Beautiful in its Decay Surya Kalsi	
Window with Clouds Christopher Woods	