

Horizontal vs. Vertical



Corisa Moreno - At Sunset

| Nonfiction

Raining Baseballs	Pablo Medina
Thing-In-Itself	Pablo Medina
Five Movements in the Key of Transience	Janice Bockelman

| Poetry

Tracings & Carbons	Micah Ballard
Ad Nauseam	Micah Ballard
New Shapes	Micah Ballard
On a Vision Of the Four Elements	Chris Crittenden
Blink	Jessica Wickens
Aurora Borealis	Candy Shue
53	Jeff Anderson
Having the distinct impression	Jeff Anderson
Ephemera	Rick D'Elia
questioning the necessity of glasses	Sarah Louise Green
fields	James McFadden

| Fiction

Sub.	Rachel Meier
Skittish	Al Riske
The Hammock	Daniel Vaccaro
On Writing:	Deborah P. Bloch
Neither Horizontal nor Vertical Be	

| Art

Steps (image 1b)	Melba Abela
Open	Corisa Moreno
At Sunset	Corisa Moreno
When the Earth was Round	Corisa Moreno



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Issue 9 Contributors

Melba Abela was born in the Philippines and earned degrees in Fine Arts and Education at the San Francisco Art Institute and the University of the Philippines. Her work has been exhibited in various US cities and in the Philippines. Her writings as well as art have appeared in *Trepan* (CalArts), *Santa Clara Review*, and in art books and poetry anthologies.

Jeff Anderson has a BA in English and Linguistics from the University of Colorado at Boulder. He also really likes math.

Micah Ballard lives in San Francisco and is co-editor for Auguste Press. Recent books include *Death Race V.S.O.P.* (with Will Yackulic & Cedar Sigo), *Evangeline Downs*, *Parish Krewes*, and *Easy Eden* (with Patrick Dunagan).



Corisa Moreno - Open

Deborah P. Bloch, a septuagenarian grandmother, is a student in the MFA in Writing program at the University of San Francisco, and Professor Emerita in the USF School of Education. Born and raised in New York City, Debby has lived in San Francisco for twelve years with her husband, Martin. Her publications include numerous professional articles and books on complexity sciences and career development, including her latest, *SoulWork: Finding the Work You Love, Loving the Work You Have* (with L. Richmond). However, her true love has always been fiction and she is delighted, at last, to follow her innermost inclinations.

Janice Bockelman is a second-year student in USF's MFA in Writing Program. She grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, and is continually grappling with San Francisco's "Mediterranean" climate. Currently, she is working on a collection of narrative and lyric essays that abstractly explores the tensions of movement and the identities of place, among other things.

Chris Crittenden is a hermit living in a remote area of Maine, obsessed with poetry. Some fresh acceptances are from: *Arsenic Lobster*, *Hobble Creek Review*, *Thick With Conviction*, and *Poetry Friends*. He was recently interviewed on Poets Café, a radio show of KPFK Los Angeles. The University of Maine has invited him to read for their upcoming program, "Prominent Down East Poets."

Rick D'Elia is originally from Massachusetts and now resides in San Francisco. He edits *Dirty Deeds*, an eclectic DIY zine.

Sarah Louise Green lives in the Bay Area where she is attending Saint Mary's College of California for her MFA in Creative Writing.

James McFadden graduated UCSC with a major in creative writing. He is currently working on a science fiction novel, playing in his band, The Wasteland Saints, and trying to get a major motion picture produced. All while somehow managing to spend 40 hours a week getting people drunk at his bartending job. Getting himself drunk as well certainly helps.

Cuban-born **Pablo Medina** is the author of eleven books of poetry, prose, and nonfiction, among them *Points of Balance/Puntos de apoyo* (2005) and *The Cigar Roller* (2005). In January 2008, Medina and fellow poet Mark Statman published a new English version of García Lorca's *Poet in New York*. His work has appeared in various languages, among them Spanish, French, German, and Arabic. Winner of many awards for his writings, Medina has taught in numerous colleges and universities throughout the United States. He was on the board of AWP from 2002 – 2007, serving as board president in 2005 – 2006. Currently, he is on faculty at the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers and Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Rachel Meier is the proprietor of the website readafuckingbook.com and is a recent graduate of the University of San Francisco's MFA in writing program. She likes tiny objects and cheese.

Corisa Moreno is an explorer of junkyards, literary forms and visual experiences. Through painting, photography and art books, she aims to reanimate the everyday human experience by highlighting the beauty of discarded objects. She is an MFA candidate in California College of the Arts' Creative Writing program. Corisa is the Editor of NameCalling.Org. More of her work can be found at corisamoreno.com.

Al Riske has worked as a reporter, editor, copywriter, and ghostwriter. His short stories have appeared in *The Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Hobart*, *Pindeldyboz*, and *Blue Mesa Review*. His story collection, *Precarious*, is due out later this year from Luminis Books. He is currently working on a novel.

Contact: [alriske\[at\]yahoo\[dot\]com](mailto:alriske[at]yahoo[dot]com)

Candy Shue writes promiscuously and often. Her poems and stories have been published in VerbSap.com, [Poemeleon](http://Poemeleon.com), follymag.com, *Washington Square*, *The Rambler*, [Pif Online](http://PifOnline.com), *Paragraph*, and other journals. She is currently in the MFA in Writing Program at USF and would one day like to see an aurora borealis in person, preferably while staying at the Alta Igloo Ice Hotel in Norway, where guests sleep on ice beds and the ice bar serves drinks in glasses made of ice.

Daniel Vaccaro is an MFA in Writing student at the University of San Francisco. He comes from a long line of New York neurotics, addicts and enablers. During various life stages, he has lived in China, Europe and his own mind. He currently resides in San Francisco's Outer Sunset where the fog and his writing practice coexist in relative harmony. More of his work can be seen at www.danieljvaccaro.com.

Jessica Wickens is a poet and occasional book artist. Her work has recently appeared in *Spell*, *Blink*, *Mirage*, and *Beeswax*. She studied anthropology at the University of Chicago and creative writing at California College of the Arts. She co-edits the literary journal *Monday Night*.

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the USF MFA in Writing Program

Editors:

Kelly Krumrie (Managing Editor) is a graduate of the MFA in Writing Program at USF. She currently lives in Colorado.

Kelci Baughman McDowell (Deputy Editor) is currently working on a poetry manuscript entitled *52 Sundays*. Check out her blog: <http://kmbm23.blogspot.com>

Colin Bean (Tech Editor) is Yet Another Software Developer living in the Bay Area.

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*, his evil twins. He has been teaching at USF since 1999. Check out his website: <http://www.livingjelly.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:

Carlos Cabrera is a recent transplant to San Francisco from the smoggy armpit that is Los Angeles.

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

Lauren Dupuis is a second year grad student in the USF MFA in Writing Program. She is working on her first novel, *Taxidermy*, and is hoping someday there will be people who read it and judge it for its awesomeness. She has an affinity for catchy jingles and whistling, as well as dogs and lemonade.

Kathryn Hopping is a second year student in the USF MFA in Writing Program. She wrote her first story at the age of seven and discovered that telling lies on paper was socially acceptable. She is currently studying poetry—a great and, until now, unrequited love. Her desire is to find the narrow ledge between poetry and fiction and write both from there. Providing endless material for her writing are her husband, son, two daughters, two step-daughters, an Australian Shepherd, two cats, and several crazed neighbors. She lives and works as a substitute teacher in Alameda, California.

Margaret LaFleur is a first year student in the MFA program at USF. She is excited to join the Switchback team and be a part of such a great magazine. When not writing, Margaret enjoys procrastinating on writing, reading what other people are writing, and exploring San Francisco.



Melba Abela - Steps (image 1b)

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

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 is currently a second year student in USF's MFA in Writing Program where she is crafting a memoir called *In the Middle of the Street* and a collection of essays about her year in India, where she trained many of the people in a certain tech company to "neutralize" their charming accents. She also teaches English as a Second Language in San Francisco and has taught in Japan, Spain, and India. She recently published an article about teaching around the world in *The CATESOL News*.

Melanie Russo began writing at the age of fifteen after a freak table tennis accident convinced her (and her opponent) that she would never be good at sports. Ever. Many short stories, a few dirty limericks, two punk bands, and one English degree later, she is now studying long fiction in the University of San Francisco's MFA in Writing Program, and is currently working on her very first novel about desert-dwelling, cross-dressing criminals. She kindly requests that if you see her on the street, not to ask her about it.

[All Current & Former Staff](#)

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the USF MFA in Writing Program

At Sunset

Corisa Moreno





SHARE 

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Corisa Moreno

Corisa Moreno is an explorer of junkyards, literary forms and visual experiences. Through painting, photography and art books, she aims to reanimate the everyday human experience by highlighting the beauty of discarded objects. She is an MFA candidate in California College of the Arts' Creative Writing program. Corisa is the Editor of [NameCalling.Org](#). More of her work can be found at [corisamoreno.com](#).

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Open](#)

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [At Sunset](#)

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [When the Earth was Round](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Raining Baseballs

Pablo Medina

Just as you fix your sight on a ball as it leaves your father's bat, another is reaching the apogee of its arc and begins to descend a few feet away. You run to that, hoping you'll have enough time to catch it and come back to get the other. Then a whack sounds and there is a third and almost immediately a fourth coming out of the sun, then several more in quick succession, followed by an old typewriter, a twirling pig, five flapping chickens, a statuette of the Virgin Mary and a flüggelhorn, a teapot, dozens of books, a machete glinting in the sunlight (how to catch that?), an automobile tire, a tricycle, three wives, many lovers, one infant enjoying the ride (can't catch him on the bounce!), a grandmother playing solitaire, another grandmother stuffing sausages, thousands of pages darkened by a language that isn't yours, a black panther, a school of yellow fish, a telescope for looking out, a microscope for looking in, a small black dog, fish hooks and harpoons and Captain Ahab and Santiago the fisherman and Emma Bovary and Maritornes the wench, no Don Quixote but a Humbert Humbert, an Ursula Iguarán, a Pere Goriot, a duck, an inkwell, a feast of cannibals, a pot of beans, angels and demons fighting for your soul, a boy building sand castles in the make-believe beach of his wanting, where an island boomerangs constantly around his head.

When it is all done the field is steaming from all the objects, the names, the melting memories. You wind your way to where your father was standing. Now only the bat is left next to home plate. You feel defrauded. Who could ever catch so much in a lifetime, let alone fifteen minutes? You pick up the bat and go in search of your father and find him with his back to you urinating in some bushes behind the dugout. He turns but he is not your father. His face is bland, indeterminate, face of Don Nadie, a nobody. You ask him the meaning of this. You were simply fungoing at first, catching balls he batted out to you, and suddenly, without warning, the world rained down. His answer comes slowly, as if he were searching for the right words. You wanted to play, he says. Baseball, you say, not life. What's the difference, he asks. Where is my father, you ask. You have no father, there never was any father. You made him up in order to play the game. How about my mother? She's out in the field, in triplicate.

You ask him who he is and all you get in response is the smile of a not-quite-fallen angel. He walks out of the bushes and into a car that vanishes down the road. Now you look over the mess on the field and wonder if you should clean it up. You decide that while it may be your life, it is not your responsibility. You step down into the dugout and put your glove into the bag you brought with you. Somehow you missed your mother coming at you. You look back at the field one last time and there she is, as the man said, in bed retching with pain, in the hospital gurney surrounded by blue curtains, in the hot night soaping herself in her bath.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Pablo Medina

Cuban-born Pablo Medina is the author of eleven books of poetry, prose, and nonfiction, among them *Points of Balance/Puntos de apoyo* (2005) and *The Cigar Roller* (2005). In January 2008, Medina and fellow poet Mark Statman published a new English version of García Lorca's *Poet in New York*. His work has appeared in various languages, among them Spanish, French, German, and Arabic. Winner of many awards for his writings, Medina has taught in numerous colleges and universities throughout the United States. He was on the board of AWP from 2002 – 2007, serving as board president in 2005 – 2006. Currently, he is on faculty at the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers and Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Raining Baseballs](#)[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Thing-In-Itself](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Thing-In-Itself

Pablo Medina

There is in almost dying, the island in mid-ocean, veiled by morning light, a thing-in-itself castigating our expectations with the crisp green and fawn red of its landscape. You swim toward it, knowing you will never get there without first abandoning the complicated machinery of ropes and pulleys that tie you to cause and consequence. These are various and at times contradictory. One day you are living surrounded by desert, an ocean of sand that keeps you gasping for air. Another you dive into the real sea, not the metaphorical one, but waves are harsh and sharks are waiting. On the shore your wife calls out to you, and so you return, subsuming your courage to her fear. The essence of island is one that glows on a calm sea for which there is no map or exercise, and no return. As the morning light illuminates it, it clarifies, fills with the shadows of childhood, although on careful scrutiny you discover there are no actual children there, only old people (youth that age has vanquished), among them a man sitting on a porch smoking a cigar, unshaven, spitting out tobacco juice. On the other side of town, which is invisible to you, there are the sounds of commerce: merchants arguing over the price of cod, vendors crossing the street with sacks of coconuts on their shoulders, butchers whacking at pig carcasses with their cleavers. You are the old man who listens, you are the merchants and the vendors and the butchers, you are the island, the thing-in-itself, that will soon disappear into the dark sea, leaving behind a space no one recognizes, a cigar floating in the foam of the waves, a disembodied whisper the poet calls the nothing that is.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Five Movements in the Key of Transience

Janice Bockelman

I.

Wish you were here.
Gone but not forgotten.
On the road again.
Life is short and the world is wide.

If it is true that 1/3 of Americans do not use all of their allotted vacation days, then 713 million unused vacation days float into the atmosphere, or something like that.

Time poverty enters the vernacular: one of the catastrophes of our time we are too busy to address.

At home, we clutter our lives with Play Places, BlackBerrys, 973 television channels, man-made, indoor mountain slopes.

We wonder why we continually reach for a *getaway*.

Anything that is not a tour, not guided, not packaged or wrapped or itinerized, not listed on the Internet, in a book, or magazine. *Far-flung* is key. This desire becomes popularized to mythic proportions and soon deserves a category of its own: *off the beaten path*.

We do not know where we are going, and it does not matter; loose lips and schedules untethered are rewarded by virtue of the spontaneous and cosmic. Or of all the drugs we took last night. To bring chaos. Or of all the drugs we take daily. To function.

In the 20th century, our nascent culture founders philosophically. A small and growing group begins to snatch those days back. Long-term travel blooms. It is fervent, professed by many and misunderstood by others, who deem it “irresponsible” and “indulgent.”

Flashpacking enters a select vernacular: the desire to go knows no class border.

Flash•pack•er: noun **1.** An affluent backpacker that adheres to a strict meal and accommodation budget, spending freely for convenient, timely transportation and recreational activities in the chosen destination, thus adopting a *flashy* or stylish lifestyle at will. **2.** A backpacker with a disposable income that maintains a tight budget by day and indulges in dining and comfortable accommodation by night. **3.** A backpacker that travels with cell phone, iPod, digital camera, GPS, laptop, and other modern technology.

When one foot in front of the other is the mantra for the day, shoes have no matter. iPod and laptop are comfortably

protected, owner aptly connected.

II.

“We should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return.”

-Thoreau

There is a kind of movement that shares the realm with comets, meteors, supernovas. Moving through space and time for light years, incandescent for an instant.

The edge of a forest (an alley, a river, a border)

One foot in front of the other

Man becomes fleck.

Travel permits day-to-day movement within one city or a jaunt over the hill to the next, but suspends us just beyond the intimate sphere of movement, of routine, that wherever we are everyone else is enveloped in.

We float above or below the hum of traffic of everyday life in the orbit of motion, we move little, if at all one day, and take a great hurdle, across rivers and towns and countries the next. Still, the force field remains.

The currency changes from kip to dong to baht to peso to pound, to yen to crown to gilder, and even this we do not want to let go of. The pile of change grows.

Everywhere we go, things move slower than where we were. A state of mind?

At first the dilation of time, of a single day, the possibility, is dizzying, then gripping, then addictive.

The heartbeat returns, and it is not frenetic, it is not erratic.

There is a race of people who have mastered a lifestyle that revolves around a particular and persistent kind of movement. They are everywhere and nowhere, collective individuals that move in an orbit of their choosing, in the shadows of train stations, in the alleys upon straw mats, at corner tables and upon the floors of temples, in the cracks and gaps, sitting next to us. It appears they are still.

In them there is no past, no future, no nostalgia, only one foot, and then the other. They tell us, it's not for everyone.

The in-between minutes of transit hold up the other end of paradoxical motion, stagnant pacing among the hours of the day that life is poured into.

When we travel, we live on maps in false permanence. Among the many difficulties with living on a map for any period of time is that time eventually sparks and restarts no matter how far we have come, or gone. The map dangles this element, the subjectivity of time, pausing for the moments and days devoted to it.

(Time's up.)

Concentrated evanescence diminishes the significance of time. The conflicted state between lingering and moving

troubles this; a state in which time would have been quantified by place, and twenty-four hour increments of time could have been acknowledged in vain.

Footprints come and go. But the eyes, those we will remember.

We wait, move on, spiral out.

We swing closer to and farther from reality. We are pendulums of our pace.

A view from the airplane window: dappled stability among fields of transience.

| [Next Page](#)



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Janice Bockelman

Janice Bockelman is a second-year student in USF's MFA in Writing Program. She grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, and is continually grappling with San Francisco's "Mediterranean" climate. Currently, she is working on a collection of narrative and lyric essays that abstractly explores the tensions of movement and the identities of place, among other things.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Five Movements in the Key of Transience](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Tracings & Carbons

Micah Ballard

For several days
I waited for the sun to come up
then went back to work
the winged ones were of lowest rank
(intermediary beings)
I said nothing of their features
but recognized them
by the little flames above their heads
I began to feel hungry
& felt around with my feet
to see if I was touching the floor
wanting their leave in me
they held out their arms
the months & years began to add up
my body was first to go
added lines, creases to the skin
then it was the hair & eyes
previous lives conjured then rewritten
some of them stayed close
while others chose to come & go
now I bring them paper & ink
wait on days to receive



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Micah Ballard

Micah Ballard lives in San Francisco and is co-editor for Auguste Press. Recent books include *Death Race V.S.O.P.* (with Will Yackulic & Cedar Sigo), *Evangeline Downs*, *Parish Krewes*, and *Easy Eden* (with Patrick Dunagan).

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Tracings & Carbons](#)

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [New Shapes](#)

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Ad Nauseam](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Ad Nauseam

Micah Ballard

Incessant rain.
No more wind to weep the noise,
rattle the blinds
I had wanted a flat on 42nd
but instead retired to a monastery
to mask the exhaustion.
I hid in the bathroom for days
& scorned any notion of their permanence
as long as my body held on
I traveled from one state to another
then didn't see anyone for months
I hope to return a forgotten nobility
& lure back the faithful
young literati too rich to care
a drastic deterioration
virtual in every particular



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

New Shapes

Micah Ballard

Humbly alive again
walking through someone else's
death not mine this time
they are usually small
then you move on to the next
unaffected, besides paranoid pale
& the usual horsemen
they like to be spoken to
at random at ease
to recognize they are there
is all that they want
it's better to keep it up
at random and not summon
for your own sake
but sit back and do what they want
all the while taking notes
not your notes, only theirs
then you act like nothing happened
and keep on acting
because nothing does happen
unless they want to.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

On a Vision Of the Four Elements

Chris Crittenden

shattered and gassed,
boiling bits of clues
that struggle to warn,
a hubbub within four,

the quartet dissonant:
part blaze part Om,
part flood part wheel—

a grate that steams
what it devours back up,
the chewed indistinguishable
from the teeth,

the dwellings inseparable
from the vortex.
cities messy and flowing,

clothes swordfighting
like windy blades
in bustles that slant and strut,

wool of a turbid flock,
uncertain which screams
belong to sheep, and which
to bolts that split
over burning war.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Chris Crittenden

Chris Crittenden is a hermit living in a remote area of Maine, obsessed with poetry. Some fresh acceptances are from: *Arsenic Lobster*, *Hobble Creek Review*, *Thick With Conviction*, and *Poetry Friends*. He was recently interviewed on Poets Café, a radio show of KPFK Los Angeles. The University of Maine has invited him to read for their upcoming program, "Prominent Down East Poets."

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [On a Vision Of the Four Elements](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Blink

Jessica Wickens

Look out the wide windows

when the ships come under what authority is skin

the port blisters binds its steel but here

smaller make yourself make me

Placing piece by tiny piece

of the night inside my chest

you're sleeping there you're falling

asleep

into teeth and neck embrace

up close it's not a blanket too much growing in gold grass

I'm flat on the floor head in the speaker and finger

by finger the light passes easily through us

teasing out the hairy breath a plaster of yolk but be rinsed away

be chaff if you must be



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Jessica Wickens

Jessica Wickens is a poet and occasional book artist. Her work has recently appeared in *Spell*, *Blink*, *Mirage*, and *Beeswax*. She studied anthropology at the University of Chicago and creative writing at California College of the Arts. She co-edits the literary journal *Monday Night*.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Blink](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Aurora Borealis

Candy Shue

Pushed by the particles of God's
countenance, a partial vacuum,
fluorescent, obscure, the surface
on which flammable liquids float.
Fleecy or vaporous? This vital spark
of flint, sensitive to the bit, a space
producing sensation. Ice alloy, low
specific gravity. Intensely timbered,
Aphrodite inflamed the fire in the eye.
I descend from the deliriously skirted
frame, asteroids spinning ever faster.
Ancient magnetic north, fickle me
and disclose. Delivered of child, do
I illuminate embroidered vessels, re-
veal divisions risen from the land?

Sleep—

a winged valve, a phosphorescent
gun, gathers and scatters its signal-
fire, a luminous curve, a reversible
traffic.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Candy Shue

Candy Shue writes promiscuously and often. Her poems and stories have been published in [VerbSap.com](#), [Poemeleon](#), [follymag.com](#), [Washington Square](#), [The Rambler](#), [Pif Online](#), [Paragraph](#), and other journals. She is currently in the MFA in Writing Program at USF and would one day like to see an aurora borealis in person, preferably while staying at the Alta Igloo Ice Hotel in Norway, where guests sleep on ice beds and the ice bar serves drinks in glasses made of ice.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Aurora Borealis](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

53

Jeff Anderson

Golden ratio—
accumulation or
growth
accretion of
calcite; to
calculate the
immac(awake in the dark
)ulate
—sea shell

writing construction fusion systematic marks are gone and gone the symmetry of folds
and inherent a symmetry¹ in logorrhea like secretion on the page connect with syntax

the dots
are
like letters in words;
micro(not seen, electrons
bombard,
bounce back, and
affect
the examined: a
particle[ular]
gaze)
scope

broadens
(e)
dots, bl-
ips
fission, recursion:
sy[stems(roots
sprout: delicate
flesh)]

spiral
(inward, phi

[laws,
force,
prob
-ability fields{
flat, curving
with pendulum
predictability and

sine waves /like greetings/}
chance as
force]).

Streams

(dictionary and usage linked)

cut

slowly

(language distinct from thought, and thought above poetry –)

down.

“That is not what I meant at all.

That is not it, at all.”

¹ symmetry—My sister has symmetry on her forehead; screw holes the dark brown of scar tissue; her neck has a 4° list to the left, remnants of the angelic.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Jeff Anderson

Jeff Anderson has a BA in English and Linguistics from the University of Colorado at Boulder. He also really likes math.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [53](#)

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Having the distinct impression](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

Having the distinct impression

Jeff Anderson

of walking in of entering of disturbance of intrusion. Chairs are lined in nothing but primes, groups of two of three of five of seven (w/ an absence of groups of four or six). Linoleum floor, complete with false perspective(s) built into the straight lines and

tone changes.

Low ceiling (seven feet, prime). A short door (five feet). Undulating hall, even, perspective lines pressing and intersecting w/ walls. Low tables and groups of chairs. The tables and chairs are grouped in primes in the undulating hall following the short door and the intersecting perspective lines in the linoleum.

Recursion.

Framed artwork, parallel, carving (visual) hallways in real hallways where people are sleeping. Spread across two chairs (balled) or three chairs (flat). No snores, just imperceptible shutters instantaneously gone, plumbing clicks and flows, and the

sound of someone: spitting.

Of comfort of cricks in necks and flows in pipes of creaks in walls and the phoneme /p/ of spitting. Solitary sleeping conversing w/ dual sleeping. Conversation of false perspective. Of the phonemics of spitting: /p/ or /t/ or some other

voiceless stop.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Ephemera

Rick D'Elia

The days when the boys, with wine soaked teeth watching porchlamps quit, keeping their lapels pressed tight, trying their best not to shudder down tenement stairs may come again. The clutch sticks and struggles while the transmission rattles down Fellsway West crossing the bridge creaking with sunset. Maybe this time lust will buckle.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Rick D'Elia

Rick D'Elia is originally from Massachusetts and now resides in San Francisco. He edits *Dirty Deeds*, an eclectic DIY zine.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Ephemera](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

questioning the necessity of glasses

Sarah Louise Green

A. her grandfather staring out the window 15 years
of looking for something in the steamed glass
he died of impatience one day, but his body
just kept on: the two shall become one flesh

B. who has hidden the *Lai-See* behind the mirror?
who has sewn the button-eyes on the rag doll?
sweep away the days of twelve months:
the New Year ends and begins in fire

C. the Doctor lets her pick out any pair she likes
because she was torn in two by alphabets,
Lichee, persimmons, she sorts fruits and
misnomers according to color – red to brown

and her grandmother still has half a mind, full of
Discovery Channel specials: *The Deep Sea*
or *Mars*, it makes no difference which—her limbs
will be packed into angels or urns.

touching their noses to the panes as they wait
for the good luck monkey or mercy;
tore up the yard looking for family secrets and
found layers: decomposing persimmons, birdbones.

*hey china, hey china! your eyes are slits,
and so is your vagina! – hop skip jump –
the lower-case l splits down the middle,
hole becomes home: earthbound/airborne.*



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Sarah Louise Green

Sarah Louise Green lives in the Bay Area where she is attending Saint Mary's College of California for her MFA in Creative Writing.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [questioning the necessity of glasses](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

fields

James McFadden

i.

Douse the burden on your
muddled flanks

It shatters in a bath of
robot sparks, you stutter
out the measure of fuse-blown
transmissions to hack your
way through a field of ghosts-
then write a letter about it:

“Dear Recipient,

fields are a wick burning

fields become the graph
in dives

fields are rising pistol smoke

fields teeth their grain
against the sky

P.S. fields to carpet the dead
beneath the earth.”

| [Next Page](#)



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

James McFadden

James McFadden graduated UCSC with a major in creative writing. He is currently working on a science fiction novel, playing in his band, The Wasteland Saints, and trying to get a major motion picture produced. All while somehow managing to spend 40 hours a week getting people drunk at his bartending job. Getting himself drunk as well certainly helps.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [fields](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Sub.

Rachel Meier

She derived an unexpected pleasure from changing his diapers. The antiseptic freshness of each one folded in the package. The stack of thick rags—bleached achingly white. Flannel, someone had advised her, would be best.

When they met she had been nineteen. He, forty-five. He was her Latin professor. They had sex in her campus apartment every other weekend, when her housemate went down south to see her high school sweetheart. The first time he spread her legs he cried out, “Actum est de republica!” And pretended to faint from the sight.

Once, when he was still her professor he had missed a class. A cold he had caught from her. There had been a substitute. One of his teaching assistants. She remembers being thrown off by this other man on the podium.

He was not her first lover but he was her first affair, and, as it turned out, she rather liked being a mistress. “Clearly, you’ve never seen *Casablanca*,” he protested one night when she expelled him from bed to ensure that he arrive on time to his wife’s father’s birthday party. “Id es vita,” she said.

“Est,” he corrected. “Id est vita.”

He was the only Latin professor at the college when she was enrolled. They both agreed it would be best if she was not his student again, so she gave up Latin. She blamed him for her rudimentary conjugation. He blamed her for his herniated disk—she made him go ice-skating! At forty-nine! They both blamed his first wife for the cancer eating away at his spine. After all, neither one of them had any family history of the disease. Not even a cat, a gerbil. And first wife, her family was just chock full of it. “I mean, where else do you pick up a thing like that?” they had said to the doctor. He, in disbelief, had said nothing.

She was making breakfast when she heard him call over the baby monitor, a hand-me-down from her sister. The babies her sister had listened for were now eleven and fourteen. She could hear him fussing around. Then periods of stillness when, presumably, he was catching his breath. And then more fussing. Finally he called for her.

“Just pretend like I’m the baby we never had.”

“I didn’t want a baby.”

“That’s right. You didn’t.” He was quiet for a minute. “Ok, then you lie down instead.”

But it wasn’t like with a baby, and for this she was grateful. His limbs stayed quietly where she placed them and she was not gentle. She had to use her own strength and also what was left of his to get the job done. He was heavy. She had no choice.

In the beginning, before their bodies had learned the motions, it had been awkward. But like anything—setting up the coffee maker the night before, listening to opera, biting gently on the underside of his jaw during sex—it had been learned.

Still, she sweat from the effort, her skin prickling and flushing, but she knew where to place her hands for the most leverage. How to best take his weight onto her. She knew what would make his breath catch in his throat and what would make him gasp, outright. She was careful not to rush him, and, at times, she found herself drawing it out longer, and longer. Sometimes he closed his eyes, said nothing, and simply let her work him over. Other times, when he was feeling more energetic he talked to her, met her eyes, pushed back against her.

She thinks, still, about being his student. About his body pacing back and forth across the lectern. About the one class he missed and how it unsettled her to watch a stranger take the place of her lover. Unsettling hearing her lover’s phrases, admonishments, and lessons issuing from the mouth of another. It made her feel as though, from his vantage

point behind the lectern, he too could picture the mole on the inside of her thigh. Understood just how to make her wet. Could hear her cries of pleasure.

She knew, of course, that this was ridiculous. But now, years later, after the shape of his face has long been lost to her, she wishes that she could summon him to her. That he could do, what of course is impossible, what he had never, not for a moment, done. That he could, against all odds, stand in.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Rachel Meier

Rachel Meier is the proprietor of the website readafuckingbook.com and is a recent graduate of the University of San Francisco's MFA in writing program. She likes tiny objects and cheese.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Sub.](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Skittish

Al Riske

This is the low point of my life so far. I'm 29, almost 30, and I'm working in a bookstore in Bakersfield—a chain that has strict rules about what we can have on our shelves and how long it can stay there before we send it back and get something else. Something someone will buy.

I spend my days tearing the covers off paperbacks and mailing them to various publishers. Just the covers. Saves on postage. The depressing part is that I'm left with all these faceless books that have to be destroyed. It's against the law to give them to anyone, and who would want them? I mean, technically, you should still be able to read them, no problem, but I've tried it and it's no good. Like talking to someone who has no face.

Even if you're a good person it would be hard to talk to someone with no face. You'd avoid it if you could.

That's not why this is the low point of my life, though. It's the low point for a lot of other reasons. The big one is that Jerry, my boyfriend—ex-boyfriend, I should say—comes into the bookstore tonight and just starts talking. No hello or anything.

I walk away but he follows me from aisle to aisle as I put new books on the shelves and rearrange old ones, the ones browsers have moved to random places, to get them back into alphabetical order. In biography, I'm momentarily confused until I remember that, here, the books are arranged by subject, not author.

I suppose the real reason I'm out of sorts, though, is because I don't want to hear what Jerry is saying. Certainly not here. I'm a private person. I don't want to have this conversation in a bookstore with half a dozen quietly browsing (and listening) customers.

We end up across the sales counter from each other. For a long time we say nothing at all, and finally I blurt out, "Jerry, I told you I don't want to talk about it." Which is kind of funny because we weren't talking about it anymore.

I notice my coworker, Paul, off to my right. He looks down at his inventory sheet.

Jerry backs away, smiles.

"Okay," he says. "See you later, Sasha."

His voice sounds all sweet and he smiles again and waves, but I just narrow my eyes. I pretend my face is made of stone. I give nothing away.

Once he's out the door, I turn away, fold my arms and stare at the floor.

"What was that all about?" Paul asks.

I try to stay tightlipped about the whole thing, but there's hardly anyone in the store now—just a teenage boy in the photography section and a shopgirl by the magazines—so a couple of gently prying questions from Paul is all it takes. He's really nice and kind of cute. (Too bad he's so young.)

"He came in to tell me he has my dog and is planning to keep her."

"What?"

"He didn't say anything to me beforehand—just went to my place while I was gone and took the dog."

"Who does he think he is?" Paul wants to know.

Paul, named for the apostle, is a practicing Catholic and seems to genuinely care about people. I was a Catholic myself once, but only briefly. I don't do mass or confession anymore, but I know God is inside me. There's no other way to explain how I'm able to get up each morning.

"It was his dog to begin with," I say. "He gave her to me."

Then I have to explain about me and Jerry and the dog—a beautiful retriever/lab/setter mix Jerry had never really wanted. That's why he gave her to me. He said he wanted me to have Jules because he could see how much I loved her, but the truth was he could no longer be bothered to walk her or feed her or do anything but kick her when she got underfoot.

"I love that dog," I say. But I hear no emotion in my voice, which is weird, and I find myself staring at the floor again. Jules is my dog. She loves me.

"Maybe I should let him have her," I say finally. "Then I'd never have to see him again."

"From the sound of things, the dog is this guy's last hold on you," Paul says.

I nod dumbly. He doesn't know how right he is. I'm moving next week and haven't told Jerry or anyone else where I'm going.

Paul is still talking. "He probably has no real interest in the animal; it's just something to hold over your head. Like: I've got her now; what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't want to hassle with him anymore. He's a prick, an asshole, a shit-for-brains..." When I can't think of any more names to call him, I stop. Then I add the ironic kicker, "He says he still loves me."

In my mind I can still see him smiling and waving. He gets away with so much because of that smile.

When I blink, I see Paul shaking his head, so I say, "Hard to believe, huh?"

"He has a strange way of showing it."

"I know. He seemed so sweet at first. Still does at times."

It's that smile of his. And I guess I went for the muscles as well. He works out all the time and is very strong, which always made me feel safe...until it didn't.

"Don't," Paul says.

"Don't what?"

"Don't try to work it out."

I shake my head and notice my hair is falling all over the place, so I pull it back and replace the scrunchy. As I do, I catch Paul watching me, but just as quickly I pretend not to notice. I don't know what it is about my neck. Guys are always kissing it or wanting to kiss it. It's my best feature, I suppose.

"Still," I say, "I hate to give up the dog. He'll only mistreat her."

I can still see Jules, the day I first met her. She kept circling around me, wanting to be my friend, but staying just out of reach. If I stretched out my hand she would scamper back three steps, then slowly start circling again, afraid of being caught, afraid of what might happen then.

"Better the dog than you," Paul says.

He's right, I guess, though that doesn't make it any easier.

Paul touches my arm. I move away.



Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Al Riske

Al Riske has worked as a reporter, editor, copywriter, and ghostwriter. His short stories have appeared in *The Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Hobart*, *Pindeldyboz*, and *Blue Mesa Review*. His story collection, *Precarious*, is due out later this year from Luminis Books. He is currently working on a novel.

Contact: [alriske\[at\]yahoo\[dot\]com](mailto:alriske[at]yahoo[dot]com)

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [Skittish](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

The Hammock

Daniel Vaccaro

They lay in a hammock in the backyard behind their house. A few minutes before, they had brought the hammock out and hung it between two wooden poles. A few minutes before that, they had been talking about the future. They were always talking about the future.

It's just not practical. That's all I'm saying, he said.

Things aren't always practical, she said. With a push of her hand, she set the hammock rocking. It was a colorful hammock, hand-woven by artisans from Central America, and it sagged beneath their weight.

I don't really feel like rocking today, he said.

They lay in opposite directions. Her feet twitched next to his head. They were dirty from walking barefoot across wet grass. Their small backyard was the only green space in an otherwise grey urban neighborhood.

But wouldn't you be proud of making something together? she said.

A minivan passed on the street behind the gate. Music boomed from its open windows, thumping menace. He watched it come to a slow roll as it approached the intersection. A long scratch chiseled its sliding door.

Probably for the first few years, he said, but think about how our lives would change. There'd be no more of this, for example.

She looked at the ceiling of the gazebo, noting the places where the wood came together. There were steel bolts at the seams. A spider had woven a web in one lofty corner. She reached down again and with a push set the hammock rocking.

I don't really feel like rocking today, he said. When I close my eyes I feel like there's nothing beneath me.

It's soothing, she said.

The sun. A few clouds in the sky. Behind a barbed wire fence across the street, a hammering sound came from the mechanic's garage.

Can I come over to your side? she said and put one leg over the edge.

Can't we just stay like this for a while? he said. I just got comfortable.

Okay, she said. She pulled her leg back and the hammock fidgeted.

The church bells sounded for twelve o'clock mass. Two squirrels chased one another to the pinnacle of an evergreen tree. He watched them scramble branch to branch, and then descend. They tightroped the fence top, chattering.

Do you really think you'd be any good at it? he said.

She turned her head to the side and closed her eyes. It might be the only thing I'm good at, she said. Don't you think I'd be good at it?

Well, he said, you can barely keep a plant alive. He smiled, but she didn't see him. He closed his eyes too.

She almost said something. It was true that her garden hadn't turned out as planned. The few tomatoes she was able to grow were stolen just before they got ripe. But that wasn't her fault. They had to take the hammock in at night as well.

She shifted her weight and set the hammock rocking.

I asked you to stop rocking, he said. I don't wanna ask again.

It's soothing, she said. Her breath followed the movement of the hammock. She drew her attention away from the

noise of passing traffic, and church bells, and the tinkering of automotive repair, and let it rest in the silence.

I just think we need to be practical about it, he said. And when she didn't answer, he opened his eyes. He looked at the mole on her upper lip. When they'd first started dating, he'd dreamed that he was a pioneer on the surface of that mole. He'd planted a flag on it and claimed it for the king. It seemed darker now than it had then.

The hammock was still. A small bird swooped down to the rim of the birdbath, twittering as it ventured a foot into the dark green water. Its chest feathers were ruffled in the way his hair looked when pressed against a pillow for too long. Deciding against a bath, the bird bent forward and stabbed the water with its beak. After a few minutes of thrashing, the bird leapt into the air. He watched it wing between two telephone poles and then disappear behind the house.

She twitched in her sleep and a brown strand of hair slipped across her face. She turned her head in his direction. The sun touched her chin and neck. He guessed it would be easy to cover her mouth with his hand. It would be easy to squeeze her throat with the other. She would asphyxiate before she realized what was happening.

He pulled one leg out of the hammock and then the other. He sat on the edge for a moment and then stood up. The hammock shuddered, but she didn't stir. There was no sign of anyone nearby. He looked at her sleeping face.

I just want to be practical about this, he said. He reached down and set the hammock rocking. He rubbed his hand over his face, turned and walked away.

I know, she said, and opened her eyes. But he kept walking, as though he hadn't heard.



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Daniel Vaccaro

Daniel Vaccaro is an MFA in Writing student at the University of San Francisco. He comes from a long line of New York neurotics, addicts and enablers. During various life stages, he has lived in China, Europe and his own mind. He currently resides in San Francisco's Outer Sunset where the fog and his writing practice coexist in relative harmony. More of his work can be seen at www.danieljvaccaro.com.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical](#) | [The Hammock](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

On Writing: Neither Horizontal nor Vertical Be

Deborah P. Bloch

1

She awakened in her dot.com green room. The setting moon shown through the long, low windows, turning her hair an ethereal white. As she threw off the feathers that had lightly covered her body through the many days of night, she realized that she was awake. She hoped she was still dreaming, but, no, she was awake.

This won't do. This won't do at all. The Masters did not allow her and the others to begin by being in the awakening state. They must begin elsewhere. The Masters preferred that she and the others begin by being in the town they call in medias res, but that town, as the Indian name suggested was in Indiana, and she was awakening in California. Perhaps there was some way out. Wait! She bolted upright. Once, a long time ago, one had been allowed to begin in the state of awakening. There was some hope. Slowly, she raised her nightgown. That took some time because the gown, as was the custom, stretched ten feet beyond her tippy toes and five feet beyond her fingertips. Her hope was not realized; she had not acquired the characteristics of a beetle. Then she knew,

I had a little beetle
So that beetle was his name
And I called him Alexander
And he answered just the same

Then she didn't know, but she knew,
But nanny let my beetle out
Yes nanny let my beetle out
She went and let my beetle out
And beetle ran away.

This whole day was too sad. Not only wasn't she a beetle, but there was this very tragic tale of a beetle, and she was beginning in the state of awakening. Master Z would not approve at all. What punishment would ensue was uncertain. Perhaps she would not be allowed to begin in any state—anywhere—or finish. Then where would she be? Perhaps she would be forced back into the infant school of summer. In despair, she wrapped all those yards of yellow nightgown round and round her body, covering her head. No part of her showed at all.

2

That didn't work. She couldn't breathe as the diaphanous yellow fabric filled her mouth and nostrils. Gasping, she pulled the gown away from her face and then she saw it: a means of escape. Through the long, low windows she saw that the moon had finished setting; a new day had begun. In the early blue glow of daylight, she could see giant wheels resting on the ground. With great difficulty, with all the fabric tangling around her with every move, she crawled to the window and peered upwards. Whatever was out there was big, and metallic, and—it had wings. It was a bird. It was a plane. Whatever superthing it was, it could carry her out of the state of awakening elsewhere, perhaps all the way to in medias res. Quickly, she threw off her nightclothes, completing her undressing in two hours under the usual five required for the unwinding of the windings. She donned her required daytime uniform of tattoos and earrings and slipped

through one of the windows.

It was a plane, and there were stairs leading up to a door. She thought that was strange, wondering who had put the stairs in place or why they were there. But she knew she had to take advantage of this opportunity. She clambered up the stairs, through the door, and into the cockpit. She revved the engines and began to roll back the plane and think back on her narrow escape. And then she realized. This was one more trick of fate or of the Masters. Just as Master Z would not allow her to begin by being in a state of awakening, Master A¹ would not permit anything at all to take place on a plane. She thought that perhaps she could avoid that injunction by flying the plane. Perhaps the injunction referred only to being a passenger, sitting in a narrow seat, leaning on a window or the shoulder of the person next to her, musing on the events of the past day or week or year, looking at photos that engendered memories. She tried to remember. What had Master A¹ actually said? Was it:

Fly me to the moon
Let me play among the stars
Let me see what spring is like
On Jupiter and Mars.

No, that wouldn't do. That wasn't about flying. It was a song, about kissing, and who cared about kissing at a time like this! What to do, what to do? Inspiration—that was what she needed.

Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly.
Birds fly over the rainbow
Why then oh why can't I?

Yes, why couldn't she fly? Because Master A¹ had expressly forbidden it. To make it worse, unlike Master Z who had simply said you could not begin in a state of awakening, Master A¹ had a total injunction against any time spent on airplanes. Her shoulders sagged beneath the weight of her tattoos and her face crumpled in on itself so that her nose ring almost touched her lip ring.

3

She was lost. She felt tears well up in her eyes. Not tears! Master A² had said that absolutely, under no conditions could she or the others describe tears. What would she do with the tears if she could not describe them? She looked up and saw that above the plane's instrument panel, there was a visor just like the one in her car. She pulled it down, hoping that it held a mirror and that she could see the tears in the mirror and thus, despite the certain commands of Master A², she would be able to describe the tears. No luck. No mirror. Since she knew she wouldn't be able to awaken or fly, she thought she might be able to describe tears and win over Master A² if only she could find a mirror. What shape were tears? What color? She allowed a few more tears to fall and raced to the lavatory behind the cockpit. Yes, there was a mirror, but her tears had dissolved. There was nothing to describe. She thought about her plight, and a few more tears fell, but they clouded her vision and when she looked in the mirror, she could hardly see her face and its many rings. She rubbed at the mirror. The cloudiness was not in the glass but in her eyes.

She returned to the cockpit chair, and glancing around, spotted a computer. Perhaps there was a way out. She would Google *tears*. Wikipedia came to her rescue: "Tear fluid contains water, mucin, lipids, lysozyme, lactoferrin, lipocalin, lacritin, immunoglobulins, glucose, urea, sodium, and potassium." And more, "Emotional tears contain more of the protein-based hormones prolactin, adrenocorticotrophic hormone, and leucine enkephalin (a natural painkiller) than basal or reflex tears."

She wondered whether she had gotten away with it. She had begun with an awakening, she had described events aboard a plane, and she had described tears, at least in a biological sense. No, she was sunk. Masters Z, A¹, and A² would surely punish her. She hoped they didn't still use the white-out or red rubbing things. She felt more tears drift down her cheeks, and reached out her tongue, expecting the familiar salty tang. These tears, however, had a distinctly chocolate flavor, dark chocolate, at least seventy percent cacao. And she knew: "A chocolate a day, leads the student-writer astray."



Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Deborah P. Bloch

Deborah P. Bloch, a septuagenarian grandmother, is a student in the MFA in Writing program at the University of San Francisco, and Professor Emerita in the USF School of Education. Born and raised in New York City, Debby has lived in San Francisco for twelve years with her husband, Martin. Her publications include numerous professional articles and books on complexity sciences and career development, including her latest, *SoulWork: Finding the Work You Love, Loving the Work You Have* (with L. Richmond). However, her true love has always been fiction and she is delighted, at last, to follow her innermost inclinations.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical | On Writing:
Neither Horizontal nor Vertical Be](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Steps (image 1b)

Melba Abela





SHARE 

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Melba Abela

Melba Abela was born in the Philippines and earned degrees in Fine Arts and Education at the San Francisco Art Institute and the University of the Philippines. Her work has been exhibited in various US cities and in the Philippines. Her writings as well as art have appeared in *Trepan* (CalArts), *Santa Clara Review*, and in art books and poetry anthologies.

Contributions to Switchback:

[Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical | Steps \(image 1b\)](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback

All works property of their respective owners

Switchback

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

Issue 9: Horizontal vs. Vertical

A Publication of the **USF MFA in Writing Program**

Open

Corisa Moreno

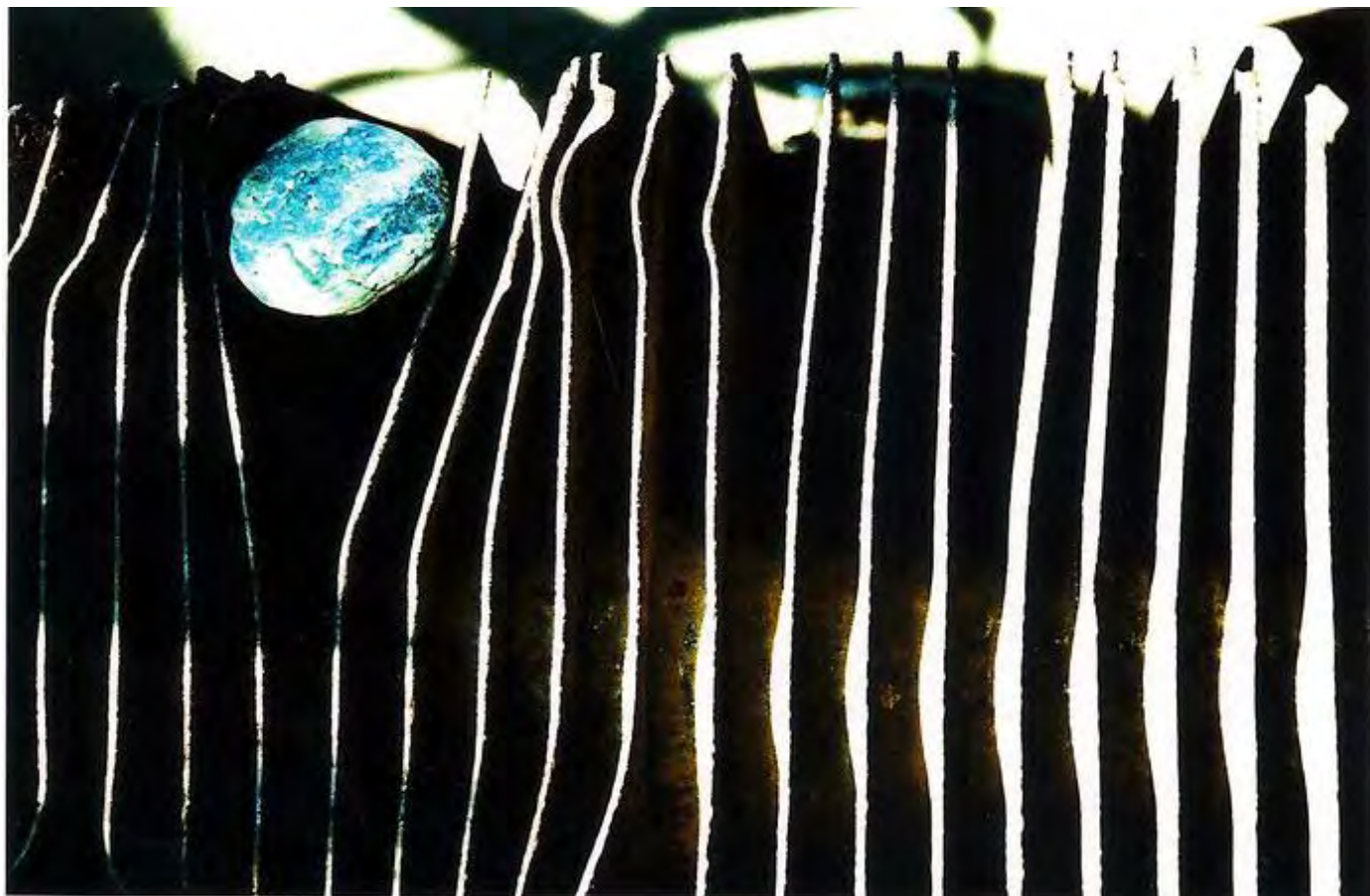


[+](#) SHARE [f](#) [...](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners

When the Earth was Round

Corisa Moreno



[+](#) SHARE [f](#) [t](#) [...](#)

Copyright © 2009 Switchback
All works property of their respective owners