Teaching Myself To See

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Published by Punctum Books

Mukhopadhyay, Tito.
Teaching Myself To See.

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I needed to sniff the pages of my magazines. I always sniff pages — consider it a sensory requirement. The magazines were upstairs. I do not like placing them anywhere else. Hats have a place, shoes have a place, magazines have a place. Don’t ask me why I do things in a certain way. Do you know why you need to drink that cup of coffee when you wake up?

I had almost learned to see the stairs in the dark by counting my footsteps, mastering the feel of the floor while I proceeded to calculate the sixty- or fifty-degree angles as I turned. The magazines would be upstairs.

I mastered measurements with my movements at night.

During the day, mathematics is out of my control. Numbers, during the day, are explosions of object counts and the business of the interacting world. How hot is it? Temperature will be a number in Fahrenheit. How smart are you? Your brain becomes a number designated by your IQ. How much do you know? Check the exam score.

Numbers become ridiculous extras for anyone who isn't interacting with the tens and totals of the purse and counts. I kept a count of footsteps at night, when numbers become quieter.
I felt the stairs while I climbed.  
The one, two, three of the stairs — all to be measured and memorized.

Darkness would be thick and thin, cluttered or dimmed by the glimpses of sky through the blinds — light zeroed on the segments of stairs. Night could be the coal mine, I was the miner excavating my way. I did not need a Davis lamp. Night could be a black soup — I was dissolving like salt.

Night expanded exponentially beyond the walls, and I could be just a decimal point. Somewhere, there was the tic-tocking self measuring time in dark sounds. Programmed in its grooved gears, it unwinded the obsessions of seconds; I clocked myself in for the ritual.

If I happen to wake up at night, I need to sniff the pages of my magazines — one page at a time, all of them every time — and then to measure my steps back to sleep as long as I am not waking someone up. Rituals manifest. Rituals are the gears of Autism, grooved to rewind. Rituals bloom better at night. Don’t ask me why. You are never asked why you drink your coffee.

Obsessions fade, other obsessions take shape, night returns mathematically in counts of hours.