Teaching Myself To See
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I Believe I Saw

If you see something being born in front of your eyes — like a piece of broken glass or perhaps a fallen leaf — and you let it grow old inside your head, then you can begin to believe what you saw. You may behold its shape talking to you. You could care less about its words — *what* it is saying. You believe you have heard this thing. And if you have heard it, you should have seen it. That is the religion — the temple, if you will — of optic nerves. Let me show you how I see.

I saw the brown rock — just by chance. Out of the plethora of things to see, it showed up in front of my eyes. Its color rested a little way from my foot. A brownish inertness, terrifically rough, as if the raw sincerity of blissful sleep had been preserved in its depths. When would it awaken and tell me the story of its galactic birth?

I memorized its shape. I memorized its color, as if I were encountering the object for the first time. There are so many shades of brown! Out of all the possible shades, *this* shade, *this* shape, out-shading and out-shaping the rest. My brain becomes an adoption center for such things.

The color wasn’t just a smear at my feet. Pickled in a bottle of centuries, scattered all over the earth, assigned to
the ground since the beginning of time, silicon and sodium and other elements gathering up equations in chemistry to sum themselves to — Brown! That chemical and mathematical Brown! Why do eyes neglect the brown earth so much?

Is it too practical in appearance, too obvious? Does it resemble the looks of a tired mother who bears plants, on which graze other animals? So many questions were blended in the outstanding shadows of that brown rock. Out of its cracks bloomed the colors of the world. Around it lay grains of dust that could be its eroded skin. And what about our skins? We are just fifty-one shades of brown in the name of race. Isn’t the categorizing of skin absurd?

We live through absurdities. One day, our bones will turn to dust — calcium compounds and carbons, granulating — and we will each conclude the process of mastering what we see. The in-between is just a conventional journey of pupil and cornea through a colorful world. People look to understand. I was looking, but I wasn’t understanding. Or, rather, a failure to immediately decipher my surroundings allowed me to see things in a different way. I was looking at the centuries hidden in the fractures of that rock.

Centuries turn. The brown shape continued to ripen. Time is a bottomless container. The bottom of the sea shouldn’t be green as they show in National Geographic photographs. If exposed to sunlight, it would be brown.

Seeing isn’t enough for me. I have to focus using subordinate senses. Sometimes I have to hear to see. Other times I must smell. I smelled the color brown as I breathed in the shape of the rock. It lay still like a dead civilization before me, a blind and mute presence of brown, bigger than the size of my brain. I was memorizing its smell, comparing it to its dark brown, deformed shadow. A
sculptor might have seen a different shape hidden before scooping out the excess brown.

As if the rock were day-dreaming — as if it could see and hear its own ancient beginnings, which lay preserved within the chemicals that had determined its properties. Cracked a million times by weather and rain and yet continuing to exist on the scattered soil.... Every particle of it was the continuation of a story that began somewhere in the womb of creation. Was it aware? Did it understand. Yes, it was, and, yes, it did.

Atomic sounds, the cracking of space,
An outburst! everything
as though out of place,
Churning outward —
a chaotic maze.

Because we possess language, we are determined to fuel our thoughts with it and state our opinions — those opinions fly like dust in between the boundary of earth and sky. Collective awareness floats as sound waves in air, interfering and dissipating. Sometimes thoughts stick around longer and form a memory. Awareness is forgetting to see the absurdity of everything. What are we doing measuring time, proving our positions?

What if there was no necessity to prove our position like that rock? What if there was simply the patience of eternal waiting and yet being aware of one’s beginning? That waiting for nothing in particular within the brown womb of wisdom, letting everything emerge from it, including life, chemicals and language! Shaped from dust, we flatter ourselves with knowledge before returning to dust, in a cycle that continues. What if the rock was aware and silently memorizing my limited understanding of this absurdity?
So I let it grow in my head. I could learn to think like it and learn its patience.

What is alive and what isn’t, who can think and who can’t—these distinctions are taught to children in primary school. Doctors and psychologists told mother one day that I wouldn’t think. Consciousness is determined by the presence of a brain. If you have a brain, a typical brain, you are capable of thought. No one has ever found the presence of a brain in foliage. Beyond the mechanics of photosynthesis, there is thus no consciousness or understanding the purpose of being. Yet the streptococcus will know out of survival instinct whom to attack without a mind or consciousness, not actually caring about the purpose of its being.

The rock solidified inside my head. Did it know that it solidified as the magma cooled? Beliefs grow solid as that rock, reluctant to change shape within the boundary. It took years to crack open the collective cranium and accept Copernicus. It will take years of weathering to crack the mind in a brown rock. I was merely nurturing its cracks. Cracks are required like human imperfection. What good is a psychologist’s office without human imperfection?

All our two times two and definitions of photosynthesis, our political understanding and complaining cannot free us from the boundary of a dusty earth and so much brown of it. How did man react watching the brainless flu virus attack a DNA strand? The virus happened to navigate into a human cell without even possessing a brain to orient itself around the blood stream. Was there a belief working in that virus? Every scientist must learn to see its belief to inflict flu with or without a brain structure.

The rock in my head was the body of the beginning to complete my looking at the day.
The churning and churning, the in-between
The locking of eyes, the closing in
Thoughts must keep — spiraling.

Imagination is absurd and thoughts can create a fiction.