Teaching Myself To See
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Published by Punctum Books

Mukhopadhyay, Tito.
Teaching Myself To See.

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Who knows how others remember faces but I do it this way.... Sometimes a story will help me catalog a face.

*Eyeballs ripen like pods. Will they rupture?*  
*Outlines of people like clouds keep sailing*  
*Scrambled faces — mixed together.*

Recognizing faces could be an incredible ability. People don’t talk about it taking it for granted. As if they will never realize how much struggle it is for someone like me. Perhaps they are not willing to know, how I have to go further down the road to fiercely fish the faces lurking underneath the surface of a social sea.

I encounter faces all the time — at the airports, planes, and random stores. Every encounter needs a tremendous visual and social stamina. But I must explain how important memorizing the face is! Otherwise what is a face but just a sitting scaffold around its story? But storying all the faces is beyond what time will allow. I can make one story at a time.

Creating a face story is one way, however time-consuming it may be to memorize a face in the social sea of scrambled faces. This face story is not what the camera is show-
ing. I create them. I create face stories about how the face escapes the photograph and prints, leaving a blank space on the page so that I can write that story. Face stories enhance the face to bring out the visually hidden aspects. How will the camera make a story? I have imagined face stories in photographs of smiling faces even though they are not blinking.

I had once created a story of a stern-faced statue in front of a college — its bronze eyes looking with a metallic indifference radiating earth smells. My story was about how the face would look wearing a mask of a superman to humor the camera lenses; and I had once seen a face story without a presence of a face — in a sky full of smeared clouds making an artwork like a child’s face painting. There was once half a face on the bare branches of a tree whose huge frowns and wrinkles grew outward from those claw-like twigs one October. There was a possible face, once, in the shadow of a lamp post stretching across the ground continuing into a brick wall. Faces lurk in those unusual heres or the usual theres. Faces don’t have to be human. Please don’t trap a face on a skull! Let a story grow the face.

Once I also discovered a face in a camel. It was chewing something, indifferent to the ground and dust, standing under the shade a few years ago when I visited a country called Bahrain. There was an awesome story dropping on sand from the drool.

A story in a face is found either sedimented or swimming underneath it, or it is elusive like an evaporating and dissipating mist. But you would hardly miss it, even if it left the face all alone stranded with mere looks and a smile or a shadow under the chin. Once the story is gone the face is just any high-definition looks until that face begins to talk. Only if I hear you talk, I will know who you are,
by matching your familiar voice upon your stored voice. Shape over shape, your voice will be the fingerprint in my brain simply because I rely more on my auditory sense than visual. So don’t just smile at me. Talk.

*Occipital explosion — camera does not capture,*  
*I recognize voices — outlines could be sinking,*  
*Isolating voices my senses don’t rupture.*

Last week I wrote a story of a face in my head. It was a heavily made-up face of a flight attendant of the last flight—JFK to Austin. There was a story masking a tired face underneath the artificial eyelashes. She asked what I needed to drink. Her story had the smell of hand wash and the feel of leather armrest; it had the weight of a long day. The story floated around the seats like a boat, floating over the flow of the airplane sound. I asked for apple juice. I have formed a habit of drinking apple juice on the plane. But this was my face story fished from air. “I named her Clara. Clara wanted to be home and yet she wasn’t. She was serving me apple juice. Smiling was her job.”

I am a story hunter. I do harpoon stories, especially out of faces. Once I even peered inside a handbag of an assistant-teacher to find a *Vogue* magazine where a picture of a muscle man on the cover stared out at me—with a fist-sized face and furrowing frown. It was only a face. The assistant-teacher had snatched the hand bag out of my homo-Autistic reach. Hunting out a face story necessitates facing risks. His story begins like this: “That muscle man got stuck to a magazine page trapped in the bag of an assistant-teacher. He had no way to discover how the special needs classroom teacher would require a Vogue magazine and impart a special education to her trophy students.”
Swelling clouds made of faces gather,
If I had sky poles, I could start them a-swaying,
Separating voices from that scrambled mixture.

Perhaps the habit began as early as childhood when looking at shadows felt less miserable than the contours of a face. But how many people actually remember when habits glue onto them?

The process of a hunt may be equal to tedious: tracing out the shadow of a person, imagining the three-dimensional head, then concluding an approximate face and finally figuring out the story takes up a complete day. Small habits go a long way if you manage to hold onto them. Did you ever imagine that if our shadows held our faces hostage, how in the world could we recover them?

Photographs of people helps manage the facial details. They are stuck to the page and wouldn’t blink to distract. Harvesting out a story in a face of a stranger’s photograph is a cultivated skill.

Shattering eyeballs split with pressure,
Vision enhanced I watch them sinking,
Rupturing nerves sink them deeper.

Autistic students are told to grow social skills. Face recognition is the key to the social doorway — and I am right on track. Any Autism expert ought to give me a high five for that.

But sometimes stories don’t grow. Ideas don’t rain enough in the brain farm. I need assistance.

I allow the other sensory channels to assist me, help me catalog storyless faces. I can attach a face through a simple sound of splashing water or a combination of smells
from page 29 of *Illustrated History of the Sun* and the overcooked potato. Call that synesthesia where senses blend without hesitation, or call that coding. I am not even interested your sciencing up of a holy process. I see an unlimited possibility that senses can offer in this coding process. It is by taste that we detect the presence of salt in a glass of clear water. It is by the smell of air freshener that I can detect that I am inside the belly of JFK airport.

Some faces can dissolve like salt within that massive sea of face solution. You swim and the brine washes your eyes. My senses rescue me like the Carpathia saving the Titanic victims in the sea. “What is that smiling face looking at me for? Aha! That is Carlos. I can smell dampness of rain full of sentiments.”

*Emotions from faces start raining all over*  
*Wind turns wild as my hands keep flapping,*  
*Without a flagpole I can’t separate the mixture.*

Habits grow me. The more I try coding faces, the busier is my nose — inhaling the smell from a book or a magazine or a candle trying to get a perfect attachment — the right key for the right lock, the right nut for the bolt, the right sweetness for tea, the right sort of right for the left. So every time I would smell page number 63 of *Where History Was Made,* I would harpoon that blotched face I saw at Walmart. I had named her Rosali. I usually siphon out a smell inherent to a page that I would assign to a face. What a gift!

*Faces clutter, emotions rain heavier,*  
*Sea full of their eyes around me floating,*  
*My ruptured eyeballs drown deeper,*  
*I hear their gurgles mixed with my laughter.*
Others may work it out differently. But let them come forth and explain!