The Pilgrim of Walmart! The immense parking lot has a special texture, a matted finish that you can almost touch with your eyes. Adding to it is a kind of a cement smell— not so much dust-like as beyond dust-like, akin to lingering sunlight or perhaps rain water stroked by wind. Smell it with your eyes, only your eyes. Because we never seem to find a parking space close to the entrance, we must walk and walk. And I must smell and go through the revision of smell every time. What cement fecundity! It’s our weekly, not yearly, Pilgrimage.

A thousand cars could fit in this marvelous holy land. The shopping carts would park themselves if they were allowed. Picture them standing side by side, brotherly shoulder to brotherly shoulder. And still there would be room for Black Friday shoppers! Of course, the wind would send the carts careening into one another and into their metallic brethren. Pity the brake-deprived! Beware the owner of the manly truck or suburban minivan! These are no-nonsense people. They all voted for the stimulus and health care in 2008, and they are determined to buy their super-sized soda from the McDonald’s outlet inside. With insurance for all, who needs health food?
I see Walmart with a sort of pride—there’s no pretense. It’s pure democracy. As someone Autistic, I usually stand apart; here I’m included. Thank God for ordinary Walmart! I look forward to walking through the lurid aisles and to drinking up the magnetic discord. I look forward to taking in the many smiles, to feeling the warmth of my brotherly walk with my cart. Even my Autism looks perfect under the thousand fluorescent lights whenever a toothy grin approaches and fades. I thrive in the ordinary, and no one weeds me apart.

Our Walmart! It can be yours too, if you care to enjoy touching what you see. It can be as simple as a potato in the vegetable aisle, as common as a jacket in the clothing section. Try it on and put it back, then see more, touch more. Pick up the packet of socks. Sniff it if you want, abandon it you don’t want. Move on! There are plenty of things to do in Walmart, and no one is supervising. You know you won’t buy these goods, but you touch them all the same. You touch what you see. Nobody minds. Everyone touches things at Walmart. Go ahead!

I have seen Black Friday shopping at Walmart on television. Recently, I saw a glimpse of a baby in a stroller. I named it Carlos Frederico José DeSilva. Two months old perhaps, Carlos Frederico José DeSilva shopped for the first time half asleep in his stroller. He was perhaps the youngest shopper. The local news channel was reporting a fight over a television set. It was all about—who touched it first? Vini—vidi—touchy... and claim! Then fight to conquer.

I imagined Carlos Frederico José DeSilva watching this scene for the first time, receiving an education in complex socially interactive vocabulary. His sleepy eyes open like automatic garage doors, as he closely watches the contest for the thirty-two-inch television set. Did some-
one forget about his stroller, in the rage of the race? Carlos Frederico José DeSilva wouldn’t find it worth remembering who finally won the TV set, yet he did get to watch the little argument that happened around it. Two people touched it first. Is that possible? Someone saw someone else touching it first while someone else also saw someone else touching it first, too! Perhaps he was learning from his stroller that Walmart is about touching. People who heard the swearing of undocumented vocabulary flowed in from all directions, like the confluence of many meandering rivers, emptying the shelves of electronic items on their way. The television showed a smartphone video of a self-declared bystander. Some people just like to watch and won’t offer help to anyone screaming their tonsils out.

To make the most of what you see at Walmart, you must touch. But during Black Fridays, to make the most of what you see, you must empty the shelves. YouTube always memorializes this ritual with poorly taken cellphone videos. We need, after all, to celebrate human potential!

Though I poke fun at television touchers, I like standing and watching the TV sets in Walmart. They play identical programs from their designated places. A whole wall is given over to them. For a while, you forget that your purpose is to touch things on the shelves, so long do you stare at these indistinguishable soldiers. The TV sets might as well be marching in North Korea! So what if you look and look until you begin to believe that you must tele-fill your living room wall?

No one will stop you. Go ahead and look. Go ahead and erode time with the wind and water of your vision. Green will look greener. The TVs at Walmart are neon celebrities compared to the one you have at home.
We Walmart shoppers plough through the Walmart, loading up our king-sized carts with artificial potatoes and artificial apples, artificial bed sheets and artificial undershirts. We feel ourselves fortunately organic. Others like us plough right alongside. “We who ain’t reading labels, ain’t affected by the fear of bird flu in Timbuktu.” We know how to smell the glare of lights, we know we can touch the yellow jackets made in Vietnam. We are tribal.

We’ve seen those health-food stores. They look like another world, a strange place resembling the surface of Venus. Their shopping carts are like space probes for the informed food shoppers who are scared to die. You and I, the common people, will buy food for survival without scrutinizing the number of calories and carbs. We who are pilgrims know how to float and bloat inside the bigness of Walmart. We nod and shake our heads whenever there is a health-care debate. And we boldly go back with not a centimeter worth of doubt.

There is more than seeing — at Walmart. You learn to see and not to stare at an isolated being who perhaps wants to touch each item from one end of the shelf to another end. No one will isolate him.

He is just a common body like them.