Teaching Myself To See
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Rain again! It can rain like a bad habit when it rains in Texas, especially when clouds float in from the gulf.

There was enough rain to cover the window, enough to wash the other side of the world with the color of the curdled sky striped by thick raindrops. Clouds without distinct boundaries, without frame, seemed to blend all over like a smear of sarcasm on the face of shapes and contours. The only prominent shapes outside the window were infinite lines created by whitened raindrops.

You had to look through the rain to see the trees and the houses on the other side; everything else seemed faded and distant; curtained and faded. Trying to outline a shape through rain, isolating the green of a familiar tree and the blue walls of the house across the street, I discovered new movements. That blurred red could be a plastic bag swirling in the puddle. Looking through a window to see blurred shapes is an old habit. Habits are predictable anchors when the other side is blurred.

The sky rained out of a habit formed three days ago, as if a learning pathway, or nervous circuit had been created in its brain and was being reinforced with every determined drop. Habits make a world of difference!
Habit is enough to hold hands with the world, linking the self to its surroundings. That there is a magazine and the magazine needs to be placed in a certain way on the table, that it needs to be held in a certain way…. The gradual ornamentation of details and rituals, locking in the senses and perceptions like an efficient design, is an art to perform and behold! If you haven’t seen an Autistic person engaged in ritual, you haven’t seen enough! None of your psychological books will describe the details of placing a magazine in a certain way.

Again, if you stop my habit, you will destroy a very valuable piece of curtain that I have woven and learned to see through as I confront the unpredictable world. You are free to look at me through your curtain — as you understand Autism. So let me fix that magazine and show you how to hold it.

Here in Texas, people have a habit. Streets will flow with rain, yet people will tell each other, “We need the rain!” Feeling the need for rain is a habit for Texans, even though one is surrounded by rain.

Everyone needs rain as a habit. No one needs to understand how the water table is going down. Perpetual drought is not a distant future anymore, however faded that reality may look today. Concerned environmentalists warn in their documentaries and United Nation speeches; seeing the inevitable through curtains of warning seems just enough, a kind of comfort. Yet more concrete, more cement continue to widen the width of civilization. Rain on the concrete streets is just a formality. The ground will seek a window to receive the rain. Yet those raindrops will never penetrate through the cement to replenish the over-used ground water.
Civilization has an obsessive habit of expansion. The habit of a handful is to warn each other in Time magazine articles and on PBS specials about acute water shortages. When all around is a wall of doom warnings, we have the thing called awareness, as in Autism awareness. Reality is seen through a curtain of infinite warning. Understanding the now-faded reality through warning leads to a theory. Coal scoops out emptiness in the earth; waterdrops on concrete dry up. You may ignore everything as mere habit.

Habit can also be an acquired interest, to fill an unthinkable void of nothingness that grows branches in the brain. It is not woven out of jest. It is earnest when seen from inside. Habit is absurd when seen from outside.

Autism when seen from inside is just a matter of life; it is earnest. When seen from outside it is a refracting prism, breaking up life into a spectrum of stimulating activities and impulses. You haven't seen enough if you had not seen it inside out.

I have experienced many habits of looking for as long as I can remember. Looking through a glass door reflecting the fan at a doctor’s office; looking through my habit in the doctor’s eyes, his voice talking through my ears like a melting sound in the twilight, relating those medical terms and instructions — my looking through has its own earnest jest. The boundary between earnestness and jest was dissolved in the blades of the soft hum of the rotating fan that day. That glass door was enough of a boundary between my way of seeing and his way of looking. Did we look enough?

I used to look at a curtain in a wherever place, a semi-transparent laced curtain that would fold the scene outside the window, causing semi-fluid visual images of trees
and buildings, color-confused and patterned against the lace design. Sometimes the curtain would slowly swing like a large magical handkerchief at the slightest incoming breeze through the window. Sometimes there would be a flying shape of a bird that would break the continuity of the usual stillness, its edges — a blur of brown or black quickly darting out beyond of the frame of the window.

Outside, sparrows frequented with a kind of certainty in their uncontrolled chirps. You did not have to wait long for the next blurred movement of another bird. There was always a sufficient blur to see.

A semi-fluid world always thickened through those curtains until the sun weakened its glow. My presence was just a formality, unreal as any imagined presence. I was born to memorize a blurred and blended world for all eternity. I have lived behind that curtain long enough to tell.

“Waiting to tell something” is a habit of acquired language. Everyone waits to tell. And no one has time to hear. We are living in an age of human conflict where every word can be heard differently and understood differently. We listen to others’ opinions through curtains of our own opinions and beliefs. Language isn’t enough to render thoughts transparent. We have blurred meanings when we listen through curtains. No wonder religious texts are interpreted so differently!

Words uttered or read will rush down like rain, projecting themselves out of faces, dropping somewhere on the brief attention span of an audience. My dropping of words in this chapter will eventually evaporate. Millions of words drop out of those television sets and radios every day. Listening through all of those words is our acquired habit.
Looking through an unrushed day at a peopled world is like watching the path of raindrops. Everyone chases time like prowling beasts; their schedules escape like speeding deer, according to the laws of gravity and motion. Seeing through people, isolating a smile from a smile, a frown from the face, reason from an annoying look, can be a full-time job, a job akin to looking out of a curtained window and guessing the blur. Waiting to look at something is also a habit; then, upon finding a sudden outstanding shape, a story begins. Seeing the story through the curtain of visual distraction became a chance, and I began, “Once upon a time through a rain of people I found a shape quite similar to a water faucet.”

A story will be enough to hold the view in control. I would view the story by placing a hundred monkeys between me and the story.

There can be hundreds of typewriters with those hundreds of monkeys pushing random keys. One monkey will happen to complete my story by chance. Otherwise the story will wait with its millions of words like everyone waiting to tell. The story may just be an unclear projection seen through the curtain of a million stimuli.

I have lived in a memory of many windows and curtains too long to forget habits. I have lived to see structures appear to fade. I can place that window and the folds of curtains between me and a whole street if the visual impact gets as big as a pile of stubborn stains. I can fade a moving car, blurred outlines disappearing beyond a definite frame covered with a patterned lace. There may be nothing to look at. Sparrows do not show up on streets here. Traffic hyper-sounds its terrific groans through Loop 1 in Austin. Behind the curtain of sound everything will sway like a flat sheet, if one happens to ignore it. And you can feel your own head swing to balance it all up.
Then by chance you will see a blue SUV shape through a mesh of chaotic rush with a white dog looking through the window at you. Window to window, eye to eye. And all the while you waited for this? Between the water faucet and the white dog, in the blue van there was a blank curtain — the cement on the soil. Who knows how many drops of visual impact fell to evaporate.

Scenes will shift like sliding covers from the table and there will be this daisy before your step and you will note its shape in your head. There will always be blank pages in between. Random stories will be the only way to look through and make sense of the vacant lines.

Then you could find one monkey typing your story with a water faucet, a blue van and a white daisy — just by the chance of randomness. That will be enough to tell from behind the curtain.