

# **Abbreviated Human**

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For the photographer.



## Abbreviated Human

She looked across the grass-filled expanse, recollecting her earlier life. It had been some twenty years since she had last seen such a sight, then as a child, and her memories came flooding back, swelling around her consciousness, as the pure *green* of the place engulfed her momentarily. Then, the image faded, although the memories remained quietly. With a degree of melancholy, Lea returned to her reality — her eyes changed focus, from the image floating in front of her, to the screen bezel that surrounded it. It had grown dark without her realising; she often did this, focussing on her work to the point that the world aside from the screen became nothing, not-real, until a rare instant passed in which she recognised its presence, and an awareness of her circumstance fleetingly passed through her mind. This was the time when she ate. When she attended to physical necessities. When she recognised that other figure who occupied the same space as her, however briefly, although they had long since grown apart. In this time, she was, *albeit* in an abbreviated form, human.

The landscape was not one she had seen before, although it resembled a memory presumably her own. Her exposure to such an image came as a result of her profession in an incidental way: she was a *developer* of electronic media – the term ‘artist’ had long since fallen by the wayside – her client, in this instance, was a photographer. The circumstances in which their professional relationship had commenced were typical: they had never met before this engagement, and, even

now, had never met in person. They probably resided on continents separated by hundreds of kilometres of sea — or possibly, lived on the sea itself, in an apartment on some portion of ‘reclaimed’ land. For her, it had ceased to be of any relevance long ago, and the photographer had expressed no interest in discovering her whereabouts: he needed his website updated, and these were the people who did it. She was defined by her role. For him, at least, there was nothing to her apart from that — and she viewed herself in a similar light.

Her gender had been revealed to him by accident alone. A message, a copy of which Lea had received, though it was addressed chiefly to another of his colleagues, spoke of her as though she were male, for that is what he had assumed. As with the technology industry generally, electronic media development was, traditionally, male dominated. Aside from this, her client would never have discovered her identity. She knew his only through his work. Disclosure by a photograph entitled SELF-PORTRAIT, viewed in the course of processing.

It was not that disclosure of identity was undesirable — no, it was merely superfluous. An unnecessary distraction from process, the core of Lea’s existence.

She was a meta-person. Her role within the organisation she worked for was defining relationships between people — she defined them, and facilitated communication through her work. The photographer’s work was challenging for her, because it came as an abstraction: how was she to represent images as something meaningful to people? Photographs lacked semantics in the sense to which she was accustomed, and this made her role difficult. Her employer, a large organisation with thousands of workers all over the world, had assigned this project to her based on a history of successful projects in depicting information in a meaningful and structured way. Presumably an unseen member of the organisation had approved this, although the recommendation was generated automatically, based on past customer feedback. She would never know who approved the project — she had never *met* anyone else who worked for this business — and, if she had, she would almost certainly have not been aware of

it.

Following the first dot com catastrophe of the late twentieth century, technology businesses, and, subsequently, businesses in other sectors, had become increasingly decentralised. Managers discovered equipping employees with laptop and portable communication devices increased productivity whilst holding costs in place — employees worked longer hours at no additional cost.<sup>1</sup> Soon, “working from home” came to be viewed as a new reality, as red tape slowly gave way and corporate networks started allowing workers to connect from home. Once again, productivity boomed, and, this time, costs decreased: ‘office’ space was now paid for by the employee. A generation on, a white-collar job entailed working from home. The term ‘office’ departed from the lexicon of much of the population, as a work-obsessed culture lived, breathed, slept in the same space as they worked.

Lea was one of these workers, but she belonged to the first group that had never known another means of employment. She had applied for the job electronically, and, in place of an interview, a series of online tests had been conducted. Her personal skills were largely irrelevant in this new capacity, as she would never interact with anyone at a personal level. Yet, her role was different from that of most of her never-seen compatriots, in that she was required to have an understanding of people, at least in an academic sense, in order to model their relationships and interactions.

Once, this had been understood by her. Once, she had experienced a degree of interaction, before distance-learning gradually replaced ‘school’ in the traditional sense. She stepped into a workforce whose culture was more work-oriented than any in history, and, seven years on, could no longer find the door — she had forgotten there was one.

Artificial lights shone brighter. The sun was not as red and hazy as it had been in the late twentieth century — nuclear energy had cleared the air, once

social prejudice had declined to irrelevance. In actual fact, social prejudice had not changed: society had merely ceased to be aware of the means that sustained their industry, their collective life. The sun was clearer, but went unseen. High-rise was the norm, and its occupants knew a different kind of light. Experiments with heliostats<sup>2</sup> in the early years of the millennium had failed because of cost, and natural light was now the rare privilege of the rich, a social élite that partied during the day, perhaps equivalent to a long-elapsed beach culture, fifty stories in the air. 'Day' ceased to be an absolute term: time could be adjusted, and was.

Lea existed in an area dominated by such artificial light. She would go months without seeing light of any natural origin, aside from, perhaps, stars. Buildings were clustered together such that there were but a few short minutes of natural sunlight a day visible — although some buildings employed prism-like devices responsible for channelling light down the centre of their structure. Lea barely noticed: her ventures outside were restricted to brief trips to obtain food and other essential items, and, every second day, to a gym, as mandated by her employer, which had come to recognise far too many of its recruits were becoming unusable as a result of ill health and had implemented such a policy accordingly.

Exercise, for her, was restricted simply to running on a treadmill. This was a standard practice amongst nearly all who attended the gym; this activity allowed the hands of the participant to remain free, and most continued to work from the gym remotely, via the terminals which had replaced the televisions seen in such venues at the beginning of the century. Lea returned home after one such obligatory session and slept, exhausted, until the next day. Although she would never admit such a thought to herself or others — doubtless made easier by the fact she did not have anyone to disclose it to — she enjoyed the feeling of motion, and, but for the addictive nature of the never-attained goal of the perpetually looming project, would have been quite content to run freely given an expanse vast enough.



She awoke the next day, and proceeded to turn to her workstation to discover a new message from the photographer, enquiring as to her progress. This message was not delivered directly, as he did not have her own contact details: instead, he sent it to a special project address that relayed to Lea care of the organisation. She replied directly, although the reply address was given as the project address, and not her own. In her own words, she was “Getting there”. Slowly. The technical aspect was being taken care of, adequately looked after. It was simply figuring out how to define the semantics of his photography, the semantics of *art*, in a definite, pigeon-holed sense. Lea could express the relational without difficulty, create ties and associations, invisible linkages. *This description relates to that photo, and this photo is under this category, and it was shot in these conditions.* All of those things were met. Simple. Yet, it was the artistic itself that eluded her: it was more than building a form into which information could mindlessly be entered, more than mere meta-data, ancillary to the core creation.

The photography must be able to be searched — that was the purpose of this project. It was not about making ‘just another gallery’ — the reason the photographer was having this developed, instead of using an off-the-shelf *thing*, was to do things differently — to connect viewers to art not on some concrete search terminology, but rather based on the meaning, the *thought* behind its composition.

To Lea, this was foreign. The notion of “art” was itself one of a questionable nature. It appeared to her redundant, much in the same way as a farmer or a tailor would have viewed her role. As in the late twentieth century, an overwhelming number of jobs existed solely for the purpose of sustaining other jobs: the marketing industry existed to promote products and services not required, sustaining the livelihood of graphic designers and electronic media ‘developers’, and, through the promotion of some products, sustaining hordes of lawyers, accountants, and the like. Art, and that which it depicted, was an anathema to

the concrete, scientific means by which she usually depicted information.<sup>3</sup>

Not knowing how to proceed, Lea continued with the mundane. The unseen, back-end linkages that were important in their own right, although of little consequence to anyone or anything once in place. She sent another message to the photographer, requesting he send more images. Lea did not know what he wanted, really. She requested more to try and understand what she did not: the *intent* behind a seemingly superficial creation. The humanity it portrayed.

Night time was silent in a way no previous generations of humanity had experienced. Lea slept in her cell, hearing a detached breathing she presumed was her own, for no other being penetrated the walls, and the walls themselves permitted no sound to pass. If she held her breath, she heard her organs functioning, or nothing. Occasionally, the building would shudder, and low-pitched waves would move up the building, torsional in nature. In the past, such sensations had been described as ‘haunting’. Now, it was unpleasant, but scientifically recognised as normative, unavoidable. One of many facts of life. And another thing challenged by this photographer.

She had seen his work, in the course of her own task, and been moved by it. Haunted. Not by the content – *that* was mundane, of the every-day. It was the presentation of this. He highlighted that which was overlooked through *art*. Perhaps most importantly, it was this role of art that made his work antithetical to Lea’s very existence, beyond her realm of quantified comfort.

In a bizarre variation on Locke’s centuries-old notion of the *tabula rasa*, Lea was a product of her surrounds—she had been conditioned to over-look, or under-look, or look askance from confrontational scenarios—yet there had been no room, no scope for variation, in her development. In her society, these ‘confrontational scenarios’ had not been disposed of – no, they were simply approached with a carefully cultivated aspect of ignorance.

Thus, once she would have accepted the motion, the rapidly encroaching and

nearly-as-quickly departing sound, as normal. Now, she asked why. Or what. A rational explanation lay beneath in the city's sprawling transportation network, but this knowledge lay forgotten to most – a fact of life that had ceased to be discussed, even alluded to. It were as though the photographer had whispered to her whilst she slept: “*Do you know what makes those sounds, and why you can never sleep for more than two hours at a time before being again awoken by this force? Do you know why the building sways, and ripples around you? Or why your vision shudders and blurs as you hear this sound not in your hearing, but rather by its effects, like the wind?*”<sup>4</sup> It were as though the photographer had implanted suppositions of transcendental interference in her otherwise-rational mind. A new agnosticism found itself entrenched in her mind, its catalyst still as alien to her as ever.

But there had been an awakening, of sorts. Her doubt had not yet taken hold—but it *was* there, creeping slowly. It was drawn forth by this photographer's art; this photographer whose identity remained something of an enigma to her. When the building lurched now, she shuddered inwardly and experienced fear. This emotion had arisen at some point she could not recall, although she knew there was undoubtedly a connection between this and her present project — it had raised all manner of absurdities in her mind, each seemingly a product of her failure to comprehend, for the first time in her memory, the world in which she lived.

Intellectualism in its purest form had no place in this society: but Lea was herself part of a class of thinkers and problem-solvers to whom nothing presented too great a challenge. It was all applied, concrete problems, and she excelled in resolving such... but her new-found failure was too much. Her world had been turned from contrived ‘intellectualism’ in which she was nothing more than a tool for achieving a purpose, to a more pure form of the same — she remained a utility, but was now called on to think about, rather than simply resolve in mechanical action, the problem presented her. Indeed, creative thought was

beyond her, the one who had functioned in a machine-like manner for so much of her life.

Lea returned to the gym, to replace one mindless existence with provision for rumination with another that was purely physical, though far more encompassing. She found her mind dulled and everything else hidden as revelations of her state at a molecular level came to overpower the thoughts she would rather not have: her comfort zone, for now, was in this ‘physical’ state that allowed her to ignore her own reality. Even here, though, she moved out of that. Her purpose was her work, her work was her life: the *reason* she ran here for hours and progressed no-where was out of appreciation of some notion that this *process* could empower her, bring her closer to the solution she strived for. She reached to the terminal attached to the machine on which she ran, and connected to her system at home. There was a new message from the photographer with more samples of the work as per her request — if not through logic, she reasoned, perhaps immersion in this work would bring the breakthrough she required to achieve this impossible task of crystallising something that defies quantification.

And so she stared at the display that seemingly floated on a glass pane in front of her, once transparent and overlooking the streets below, now filled with images of places and people she felt strangely connected with, though she had imagined neither them nor their presences nor their contexts. Lea’s attentions were fixated on the display, whilst rhythmically jumping forwards as the treadmill slipped under her, not considering for a moment the gravity of her steps that infringed upon the silence of a room in which no-one spoke to her and she spoke to no-one else. But her vision slipped, once, to a point just slightly off the edge of the projected images on the pane of glass in front of her, as movement defined a rift that existed between the static and immovable life of the screen and the reality that shifted just beyond the threshold of this display. At first she blinked and the thing disappeared, her attentions moved

back to the image: perhaps it had been just a product of exertion, she reasoned. Yet the screen's surface was of imperfect opacity, and she could see just beyond it. She saw the figure approach, at first imagining it to be some delirium — but it was not. SELF-PORTRAIT stared at her screen from behind it, in some strange apparition that somehow came forth into reality whilst sunken behind the surface of the screen, its face cloudy and unclear as the glare from her display obscured it.

Self-portrait emerged. He came to look at the screen from her side of it, staring at it also, with some look of incredulity — though perhaps with surprise not so great as hers — upon his face. “So that would make you Lea, then?” She nodded her acknowledgement, hesitantly. Her hands moved quickly across the pad in front of her, and SELF-PORTRAIT appeared. “You are... him?” she asked in return, gesturing to the display.

“Yes.” He did not offer a name, or did not think to: either way, Lea remained knowing less of him than he of her, for the present time. The machine had slowed as her own impetus had declined, and now remained in stasis with her upon it, inert. Awkward. She looked at his features, peeling away the anonymity from which he had written and, at the same time, surrendering her own. It was the first time she had knowingly met any of the people for whom she had worked, and it was a surreal experience. She always had envisaged them to live on the other side of the world, or at least in a distant part of her own aspect of it: certainly, never in such proximity. There was something about that, the expanding global nature of the connections she built, that encouraged such presumptions. Never did the idea that she may communicate with so near a neighbour enter her head: indeed, the very idea was foreign to her even as it now entered her consciousness, as though implanted by some other being forcibly. And, to some extent, that was how this *had* occurred.

“Do you come here often?”, she asked, hesitantly. “No.” came the reply: “This is the only time.” *As though he had been waiting.*

“We shouldn’t stay here, then. Are you free now?”

“Free, yes. Paying you, it seems, but your duty is ultimately your own expense, not mine.”

She looked at him quizzically in response, but his enigmatic façade remained unbroken. “I would like to take you somewhere. A day-club. It is night, and hence it is deserted: we can talk.”

Curiosity roused, Lea assented and both she and the photographer exited, the promise of exegesis or some dénouement tying her impossible task to tangible reality propelling her forth, perhaps contrary to reason. Reason, it seems, was of an increasingly diminutive role in her life: even more absurdly, however, was that she found herself not caring.

“We’ll take the lift to the second highest floor,” the photographer said. “We’ll have to walk the rest — fire stairs. They shut off access to the roof during the night.”

The lift slid upwards without stopping — few people were in the building, it seemed, and at any rate, their lift serviced only the highest floors, mostly deserted at this time.

In the city Lea lived in, transit was possible without leaving the confines of buildings. That is, roads could be crossed by going under them, in myriad shopping arcades and other such facilities that extended between buildings, linking them. Thus, it was with some shock that she emerged from the climate-controlled security of the environment to which she was accustomed (an immutable twenty-two degrees Celsius) into the night air, somewhat smoggy and thick with the unfiltered air that had been rejected by the myriad air-conditioning units mounted atop buildings of seemingly chaotic variation in height, size: an absence of planning not visible even from this point, that emerges only when higher still in the regions above, making clear the attraction

of humanity to its resources: cities shaped around water, constrained within valleys.

No, she observed none of that here. It was merely a higher view of the same, in a new environment only slightly different from her own. “Why here?” Lea asked. She added, “I’ve never been to a day club before.”

“Why not here?” the reply came. “It gives perspective, if nothing else. You versus that.” He moved to the edge of the building, lay front-down, having removed his camera which he now pointed in sweeping motion across the expanse below. ““What are *you*?’ they ask of. . . this foreign entity in their midst.” He gestured to himself, though it was not visible to Lea, as his torso was beyond the precipice already. “That’s what I’m trying to answer, I suppose.”

“Your purpose?” Lea enquired, hopeful.

He laughed his response: “Ah, yes, of course it must come to that with you, now. A purpose-driven life, that’s what you’re all about, isn’t it? Hah! No, mine is nothing like that. My purpose is. . . not so easily surmised, I hope. Anyway, it is not reflected so overtly in each piece I shoot: *that* you must understand — your task is not so simple.” She looked somewhat sullen, as though defeated by his words. “Don’t worry, I hope this night will explain enough to you that you can. . . well, you will hear more of that soon, I suppose.”

“My purpose is subversive. It does try to answer that question of what an individual is, I suppose, but that is very constraining — at least, it is semantically. Yes, there is irony there in this search for meaning: *that* is my purpose. Sort of. It’s a purpose broken by my preconceived ideals, though: mind you, I think at least some of those should be self-evident, if people actually bothered to observe for long enough. They don’t, though.

“Consequently, I view myself as a combatant against that which is best described as apathy, though it is more than *just* that. Humanity has collectively abandoned its emotional response: physical impulse remains — that’s hedonism — but the actual motivation behind our interactions is purely. . . chemical, hor-

monal: certainly not *emotional* — anything but that. You yourself are proof of it. Rational thought is the order of the day, until challenged with something more alluring even if irrational. Humanity is not rational, intrinsically. This is a condition into which you have been shaped!

“‘You’, of course, is used as a pronoun in plural form, for there are *many* like you as an individual, are there not? It isn’t just you, is it?” He looked at her, pointedly. Lea shrunk a little, not knowing how to respond — or even if response was appropriate. “Not meant to be rhetorical, but never-mind.” He continued regardless: “I suppose you wouldn’t have noticed, anyway. When was the last time you spoke to another person?”

Affronted, Lea replied “What do you mean? I do! All the time — daily!”

“Speak? or write business-like missives devoid of personality and feeling? I don’t think you do. None of your kind do.” He glanced at her for confirmation, and was gratified to see she agreed with him — her plea of guilty entered. Lea paced around the roof top, avoiding piles of stacked deck chairs, absorbing the new surrounds whilst listening to him speak: she thought him to be right, even if he had not yet completed his expression. He spoke with such confidence, with a voice that moved even her: once immovable in her aloof state.

The photographer spoke over his shoulder, still facing downwards: life appeared to him through his viewfinder from three-hundred feet in the air, and captured beneath him figures of life, people through windows, preserving as though enclosed in amber resin. “Still life, but life that *is* nonetheless.” He murmured to himself. Lea thought she heard something, and turned to face where he lay horizontally, his head and shoulders extending beyond the building’s edge. At any rate, he did not repeat his musings: she was left wondering what she had missed.

He had glanced over his shoulder just as she turned, checking where she stood on the roof of this structure for no reason other than that he had an impulse to know. The photographer noted how she was watching him, and, taking this



as a cue, commenced speaking once more — though he continued to lie on the floor, his face mostly away from her though the wind carried his voice above him and to her.

“I proclaim a new masochism,” he began. “A doctrine derived from, built upon, sensation both of the mind and body. You know both, of course, but never together: no, never together. You, as with many others in this society, are . . . incapable of this fusion. That is why my work strikes you, for it combines the two. This is not masochism in the traditional sense: I do not derive *sexual* pleasure from it. No, my stimulus is intellectual. I aim to elucidate that which has been suppressed by this time-saving ‘productivity’ obsessed world, convinced that all it does is new and amazing and worth doing more of — but never celebrating —, and shock humanity into a state of response — yes, *shock*, cause consternation and upheaval through distress. And this process is painful, hence masochism. My concupiscence, my unlawful and anti-societal desire from which I am . . . entertained. No, it is not so trivial: *fulfilled*.”

“Do not let me appear as a hedonistic fool: I am not that. Sensation is something disconnected from this cause — I believe I have already said that is this society’s sole interaction with one another, now. The gratification of desires. But this comes without *emotion*: there is none of that shock I speak of in there, none of that pleasure, even. It is just a desire, being fulfilled, and once it is done . . . life resumes. No, I am not a proponent of such debauchery. I support a cause perhaps considered perverse by some, but it is far more stable, at a societal level: I draw *my* pleasure from mere observation, there is no . . . how do you say it? There is no *inexpedience* from a social perspective, no impact on a wider scale: unlike hedonism, which is a decidedly unstable paradigm.

“If everything else weren’t already so bent on destruction, I’d tip that as the eventual cause of demise: it is coming, you know? This society *will* fall: it may not be a violent or rapid decline, but it will come. And it will not be remembered for anything, for it achieved nothing aside from self-perpetuation,

paid no heed to what came before, and seemingly cares little for what proceeds it. Or even what is *now*, I suppose: you are very much a part of that, look at your existence. Technology for its own sake, what is that?" The photographer looked back at the where Lea stood, and, though surprised to find her standing there listening still, he feigned indifference and resumed talking.

Lea, meanwhile, stood staring at a point near him, though as per her usual custom avoided making any eye contact. She had been thinking of him, whilst he spoke: all the while wondering why he bothered to do as he did, wondered what his possible motive could be. She remembered, as a child, having been told by one of her parents of his or her — she forgot whether it was her mother or father that spoke — own childhood memory, in which a strange man stood in front of a group of people and spoke, as though teaching them something greater than that which was taught in those places used as schools, before the digital revolution decentralised such things. Her parent, then a child, had been struck by the lucidity, the conviction of the speaker's tone, and this is what Lea imagined she heard the photographer speak now. This was not any message, this was not, as he had described her interactions, a "business-like missive" of empty intentions... it seemed to her that he shared his very self, as though by telling her this he was imparting some part of his own being into her and surrendering it from himself.

Lea herself, as a child, had once been to a school: only for a year, possibly two, before such things ended. The memory somewhere in the recesses of her mind, diaphanous and scarce. Yet, what little memory there was held its shape, its definition clear. The experience was altogether different from anything else she had experienced, though she had been only four, perhaps five years old at the time. After this time, her interactions had been via a medium of restricted scope — restricted, that is, excepting provisions for a hiding place. She, as with many others, had become reclusive. Reports suggested that this new educa-

tional archetype was the cause of a surge in productivity: others that suggested widespread psychological damage were disregarded, and, as an academic class dwindled to the realm of analysts and business policy consultants, so did opposition.

“I aim to capture emotion, first and foremost. It is a rare species, these days: there is regrettably no hope for breeding in captivity, either. Mercifully, it manifests itself seemingly at will — this is one thing I hope for, tonight. You are a member of one of society’s few remaining elite classes, you know that? There are the *nouveau riche*, of course, but they will always be around, there will always be some emerging ‘new’ class of wealth coming forth. No, you are greater than they: you have the ability to think, like few others do. You were one of the first to be educated as you were, and hence you were educated before technology had matured sufficiently, whilst there were still ways to hide. The result was a form of enforced autism, if you will: before technology could connect people in the sense it does today. Society isn’t getting better, though: it can communicate, but that does not mean it can express. You cannot communicate, but I have a hope you can express... that is, of course, why I am talking to you.”

“The ‘project’ was always a farce, you see. Admittedly, I would have been pleasantly surprised if you could... achieve it... but the expectation was never real. I see you are relieved. Not so easily: there is a task for you, still. Our bizarrely formed contract requires it. We are tied, you realise: your employer has nothing to do with that tie, but we are connected. Ignore your org charts for a moment, the corporate hierarchy you so often hide behind. Bureaucracy be damned, we have a bond that is *here*. Between you, and I. I have confused you, educated you: taught you without knowing I taught whilst you have learnt without recognising that you acquired knowledge. I have turned your world upside down that you now turn to rumination and then to physicality as a form

of escapism.”

“You have not experienced pain, have you? You have experienced emptiness, perhaps, but that is not pain. Pain is loss, and you have not lost. There is something, there. Something that looks like it could be pain. Walk closer? Yes — I see it. There is fear, but that is not fear of pain... just... of the unknown. Ah. I have shown you plenty of that, have I? The unknown has a power greater than most things, such that even faith in something that lies in the unknown cannot fathom. But then, you wouldn’t recognise *that* anachronism either, would you. Faith belongs to an era before your technocracy... your technocracy stole it from you, your society.” The photographer reached into his bag, and pulled out a battery to replace the now-exhausted one that presently filled his camera. “None of those people realise they are being photographed. They walk about the streets, or stand near their windows, not realising that other life surrounds them, aside from some vague notion of an ‘entity’ that is important to their continued existence. And you know what the strangest thing is?”

Lea stood awkwardly still, but managed to shake her head though her movement was muted, as if she were numb from cold. More likely shock.

“They’re all human, at some point. They could never say that, of course, simply because they wouldn’t think to. Imagine saying to the person next to you at that gym you ran for hours on end trying to work out what on earth I was asking you to do ‘Hello.’ Or more, actually having a conversation. Conversations are not things best tracked by email, Lea. Chronology isn’t important, but interaction is. Interaction and art. Art is... that which we don’t comprehend? Well, I suppose it can be, sometimes. Art doesn’t need to have meaning, though some would argue it always does: but that was the twentieth century, and this culture does not value history — Marxist views of all art being political are foreign to you, of course... I imagine even the idea of politics is foreign, you are all so apathetic now. Left and right have converged to form some liberal,

pluralistic *entity* that you call your government. Your taxes are automatically paid, the governments services are transparent, humanity moves on. Or never realised it once paused, even to vote. Yet, what do my photographs suggest? A universality of humanity, for one. That isn't as airy as it sounds, you know: I simply mean that all people are human, at heart. They may act like machines, but..." he looked back at Lea. "I think you begin to understand me. Are you cold?"

She stuttered out "N...no...", as though drawn from some reverie that ran in parallel to the stream of words she heard from him. In response to his question, though, she sat down on a stray chair, beneath the stronger currents that blew above the building.

*What am I? I want to be... a part of that image he casts, but it is all foreign. My childhood, earliest memories, are all I have. What does it take to change, to return to a state of that thing he describes, humanity? Is emulation enough? Should I compete, strive to perceive the world in the same way he does, share his vision? Or is there another way? I must share his... self... at least to some extent. I cannot construct my own life anew, regain and compose those experiences of his conveyed through... art? or whatever that is. Why is his humanity real whilst mine is... dormant?*

Assured of her wellbeing, at least in a physical sense, he continued. "I have nearly finished, anyway. We will leave soon. Go our separate ways. I think my effort is tiring, that I am nearly spent. Soon I will be done."

He spoke to her now as though reading from her employee's file on her: "You have always focussed on that which can be quantified. You are a very driven person, by all accounts: I have enquired, yes: checked references, if you will. Your conception of the world in which you live revolves around goals — corporate goals, project goals." He broke from this style. "I, however, am not answerable to any greater body, entity, or power. I have an agenda of my own, defined by myself, that I myself must achieve. What is it? Why... I thought you would

understand that by now — Lea... it is you, Lea. You, who epitomises this retreat from the senses and emotion: you, poster-child of the digerati. You, member of an aloof, *nonpareil* class of technologists, that do not recognise their own stature and are, individually, scarcely human.”

“Yes, my goal revolves around you. To jolt you from your meagre, abbreviated existence, and bring you to realise that you are in fact human and, from that realisation, revive in you a sense of what humanity is about: the abstraction that defies quantification, aestheticism for its own sake, communication for the sheer purpose of sharing, the creation of a communal space in which two people — or even more, though I daren’t dream so far — exist and recognise a bond. We have a bond, you know. But it has not yet manifest itself clearly. I have a bond with each person I photograph, but that does not make that bond reciprocal. Ours is, I hope.”

The photographer swung himself back from the precipice over which he had leant for the past half hour, placing his camera on the ledge beside him. The camera was presently fitted with a large telescopic lens: he had been using it to pick out individual people beneath them. His hope was she would search for them and... free them, even if that meant creating a bond and breaking it: inducing pain.

The updrafts continued to shift along the surface of the building, occasionally pulling back, blowing horizontally instead of vertically. A horizontal gust caught the photographer’s torso, and he staggered backwards slightly. Lea cried out, and rushed forward thinking he would fall. He laughed softly, a little indifferently, and stood. Then another gust caught him, and he was blown backwards properly now, pivoting just below the knees and slowly losing his balance: falling.

Lea rushed forward, stared over the edge, his body receding and cry apparent. An instinct to grab his camera caught her, and she clutched it in front of her, leaning over the edge as he had done, camera strap around her neck. She

focussed on the flying corpse, started to capture images of him.

His shock, as, tumbling, he sees her leaning there with  
his camera.

His face in focus, the rest of his body seemingly pivoting separately, blurred by motion against a distinct background of the road.

Maintenance workers on street level, hearing his cry and looking upwards, pointing.

Him, again looking up, having flipped again: A smile. His last, and distant, small. The realisation of their connection?

Burst fire, consecutive frames of his union with an earth that is artificial and unwilling to receive him. Stained pavement.

Lea stands there. She understands his purpose, but stands unmoving; shocked. Believes in the possibility that his fall was deliberate. Is thankful for his actions, leading to her newfound humanity: her humanity now purposeful, more than simple mechanism. Having watched an angel fall — or perhaps fly — on his downwards, final journey. Having borne witness to his penultimate act, his expression of all that is wrong with her world, her very being: having experienced catharsis and renewal and rebirth through another, Lea can now speak. “My voice.” She is surprised at its strength. She has had little cause to speak aloud, certainly not just for herself to hear. Unbidden, Lea proclaims a eulogy for her fallen angel, the one who freed her from her prison, that conveyed a message universal; true; sustaining. Lea imagined herself as though she had passed through some fire into which her society had cast her, and had come out... alive. Whole.

“I can speak. I am... capable of speaking. My *voice* is strong, I am empowered, fully and undeniably human. Humanity begets art, which recursively

enables the realisation of humanity. I do not know the photographer's name: only his art. I did not know the photographer, only SELF-PORTRAIT. I know the photographer now only through his work, but have a full sense of his self. His legacy is one of human value. I cannot speak that which is past for I know only what has been imparted: I have no knowledge of that which came before me. The photographer spoke, it seems, of a time before our collective humanity was obfuscated by its own 'innovation' and advancement. This is the goal he has imparted, the goal towards which I will similarly aim. We share this ideology, presumably once that of many, not of anarchy but of that which follows: instability, pain, followed by realisation of self, and art, once again."



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>An Intel study found employees equipped with laptops were “more likely to use [their computers] in more locations”. [<http://www.intel.com/it/mobility-wireless/wireless-productivity.pdf>] Another states “Notebook PCs are also a good choice for frequent day-extenders”. [<http://www.intel.com/business/bss/products/client/pcrefresh/productivity.htm>]

<sup>2</sup>Leonard, Tom. "Light relief for a New York park." Telegraph, London. June 3, 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Winterson, Jeannette. *Art objects: Essays on ecstasy and effrontery*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

<sup>4</sup>Haque design+research project: “Haunt” — see <http://www.haque.co.uk/haunt.php> See also — M.K. Ohlbaum. "Mechanical resonant frequency of the human eye in vivo; Ph.D. Thesis," Aerospace Medical Research Laboratories. Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. August 1, 1976. 105 pages. – in reference to “smearing of vision” when subjected to intra-sound.