



There was that song almost 10 years back: "All those beautiful boys / Pimps and queens and criminal queers / All those beautiful boys / Tattoos of ships and tattoos of tears..." Now I cringe at the thought, but one memorable night years and years ago I was high with my then-boyfriend listening to this song and I remember feeling truly complete. It was utterly simple and uncomplicated, but perhaps only in retrospect and in comparison to now.

Now I'm sitting across from you drinking tea and talking on the phone, trying to problem solve, and you seem completely relaxed and unpreoccupied. I'm trying to pay attention to what I'm being told by the girl on the other end of the line but really all I can register is you taking a photo of me. Why on earth could you be doing such a thing? I want to impose some sort of significance onto this moment, I want to make myself believe that you're capturing this image because you know that soon I'll be gone and you will only have a handful of things to hold on to. And you'll look at that photograph, yes, I know you will, and miss me, and remember that moment as something more special than it really was.

I feel a bit stupid. What else is new?

I think I want you because I know how impossible you are to get. Yes, that must be it. Deep down I don't really want you, I just enjoy the challenge. That must surely be the case, yes. What else would explain this unlikely attraction?

There is so much I want to say to you but I worry that any kind of disclosure would irreparably break this silent agreement. You know that I know that you know, but you revel in that blissful ignorance, that prolonged pretension. If only I could pull out my camera and take your photos as well, but I wouldn't dare. I wouldn't want you to think that I would gaze at your beautiful face in your absence, but that's exactly what I would do if I had photographs of you. Better to have no trace of it left except what'll stay in my head.

You talk about yourself way too much but I allow you to be as self-absorbed as you want. Of course your existence is insignificant in the grand scheme of things, but for the moment I am willing to validate your sense of self-worth because you are important to me. I am happy to make concessions, I will suppress my tendency to speak about myself and let you take the leading role in this inane conversation. So yes, please go ahead and tell me what you ate for dinner last night and inform me on the wonderful anti-oxidant qualities of beetroot. I am going to listen to you in awe.

But really, I'm feeling desperately nervous and trying hard not to show it. I realize I'm fidgeting, I'm constantly touching my face with my hands because it feels like my head will implode if I don't hold it in place. I'm profoundly aware of being seen, although your eyes are wandering around the room as you talk and your gaze averts me. I wonder if you have trouble making eye contact with people

Erdem Tasdelen on Paul Mpagi Sepuya

in general. No, I bet it's because you're totally enamoured with me and you're feeling shy. Yes, that has to be it.

A few different scenarios play out in my head in quick succession. In one of them I am grabbing you by the shoulders, shaking you and shouting "Don't you see! Don't you see! How can you be so daft?" Of course this could never happen. I have to make myself stop smiling at every little thing you say, I don't want to seem suspiciously benign and pleasant.

I am trying to listen to what you're saying but the song that's stuck in my head says "I don't wanna wait in vain for your love / I don't wanna wait in vain for your love / I don't wanna wait in vain for your love..." Can this song please disappear from the universe forever right now? How did I get from all those beautiful boys to this?

You know, I never really liked beautiful boys. I'm involuntarily drawn to them, but I always meet them with skepticism because I think they must be aware of their own beauty. Doors open too easily for beautiful boys, people always take their photographs instead of others'. I don't want to feed their obese egos and I don't want to make a fool of myself by getting rejected. And here I am trying to understand – are you one of those beautiful boys or are you really as oblivious as you seem? The last thing I want to do is to feed your ego, but I can't stop looking at you.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Studio Work*, 2012. Installation detail. Photo: Blaine Campbell

And then we say our goodbyes. It all happens fast enough, there is no unnecessary drama, but I quietly say that I'll miss you, to which you respond by hugging me. I walk away feeling a little bit stupid, but what else is new?

Since we parted that afternoon and I left you behind, thousands of miles away, I often sit back in my studio and look at the walls, trying to piece together our inane conversations. But to what end? Part of me regrets not having taken any photos of you that day, but what use would it have been to put them up on these empty walls and stare at them? Some things are better left undocumented.

Erdem Tasdelen grew up in Switzerland, Germany and Turkey. He received his BA in Visual Arts and Communication Design from Sabanci University in Istanbul in 2007, and his MAA in Visual Arts from Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver in 2010. He currently lives in Vancouver and teaches at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. He has exhibited internationally at venues including MAK in Vienna; NON, ARTER and Sanatorium in Istanbul; 221A and Charles H. Scott Gallery in Vancouver BC; and Oakville Galleries in Oakville ON.