

You're Beautiful

By Ignace Saenen
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What would be a good name for that man that sits on a bench in front of an old cafe, watching the people pass by? You see these guys in every city, in every town, on every train station. They're different, and yet, they're all alike. This man, he observes people. He looks at them. He tries to tell how old they are by comparing skin colour and body language. He poses and tries to read the resulting answers from people passing by. His eyes constantly moving. A little nervous. A little shy. A little arrogance. Looking for the story behind the walking figures. The figures are totally unaware, busy in conversations with their companions, or hastily focussed on reaching their target, or simply wiggling behind their dog. Their contour lines blend and morph into each other. A mix of weird shapes that drift by on an ocean of stories. Devoid from form and function in relation to the cafe and the bench outside, wrapping around the invisible queries that lash out with every eye twitch.

He's trying to catch them. To reshape them. To force a story upon them. To frame them into something that can be taken home and consumed. For his amusement, obviously, a reason that is as good as any to give. But only his eyes hold the truth about the actual level of despair with which he devours his subject matter. Upon closer look, the bench appears to be filled with a big gaping hole that is looking for impossible fulfilment, a dark energy attractor that compares, matches, recalibrates and mimics its surroundings, playing out the transcripts in a fantasy world that may one day be real. Or simply replaying past events and trying to recapture the true reason behind decisions. And all of this, under a fragile skin coloured cloak of sympathy, beauty and intelligence, and maybe a cigarette.

Will we ever grow up? Because that man looks very familiar. I estimate his age to be under 10 years old. That is, if you don't count the wrinkles on his marked face. His swollen belly the animated sign of the many many many hours spent on this passionate hobby of his on the bench. His expression a mixture between endurance and invitation, between psychological travesty and childish secrecy, between the genuine sadness and that familiar naive smidgen of hope in the reflection of his eyes. What is behind that black hole? Why is it there? Who put it there? What will happen with it? These are the questions that keep distracting his eyes, as they scan through the couples and groups of friend and families and football friends and students and little girls giggling and babies being pushed forward in their hotrods, mothers and grandmothers tripping over dogs and looking at the sky or the men that they shouldn't be looking at.

Today, one of these men caught my attention, because he was sitting reversed, with his back to us. He was covering the hole himself, so it became a bit more invisible, and definitely smaller. Quite a strange sensation to watch him sit and talk like that. In fact, the whole world could be quite shocked by this inadequate behavior, but apparently the whole world didn't care today.

I wonder what his story might be..