

Trust Minimal Distance.

tmdistant by Lauren Meaney





I first met tmdistant at his London gig in February 2025. As of writing this, it's been just over a year since we first spoke. I had requested to photograph the gig via his manager at the time, Georges. I knew another artist on the lineup but had never heard tmdistant's music before.

I enjoyed his set, and I would say I became a fan from this point. I don't think we spoke beyond a brief introduction, but we followed each other on Instagram, the modern-day confirmation of acquaintanceship, and exchanged direct messages and comments over the next few months.

We had seen each other at events across the rest of the year, but it wasn't until November of 2025 that we started to work together officially.



I next photographed tmdistant opening for Sunday Best at Signature Brew Haggerston in November. At this stage, he knew that I wanted to make long-term work about a musician, but I hadn't decided on a subject yet.

I was invited to photograph the show by his management at the time and had free rein to photograph throughout the night including backstage and outside the venue.

Before the gig, I stayed overnight with some mutual friends including his guitarist, Matt. Matt and I travelled to the venue where we were met with numerous issues including entering and setting up the venue. Matt carried the stress on behalf of tmdistant and the band. When tmdistant arrived, he seemed unphased by the stressful situation. He remained calm and confident, at least on the exterior.





I met with tmdistant a week later, in a studio session he had with Matt. It was my first time seeing him out of a performance environment – although still within the context of music – and the first time using his offstage name, Tea.

Matt worked in his bedroom studio which I had visited once before with another artist. It was intimate, comfortable and absolutely freezing as his radiator didn't work.

It was nice to connect with both Tea and Matt. I had a terrible day before I met with them, but they were both very supportive and ensured I was okay. I think this broke the ice for us. Across the evening, I took an observational approach to the studio session but occasionally joined in conversations and shared my thoughts on the music.

After Matt and Tea were happy with the song so far, they decided to take a trip to the local corner shop. I joined them, interested to see and speak to them outside of a music setting. During the walk to and from the shop, I felt more like an equal to them. I have nowhere near the knowledge of music they do and felt my insight wasn't very helpful in the studio.

Matt bought a Coca-Cola, which was not a surprise given his room had bottles and cans dotted around. I felt as though I had met my match. I drink a lot of Pepsi Max Cherry. Tea bought a Tropical Vibes drink in mango and carrot flavour. I wouldn't have guessed this choice, partly because I didn't know the drink existed, but also because I didn't know much about Tea yet.



Towards the end of the year, I worked with Tea's management to film content in a rehearsal studio for all their artists. This included Tea, who was in the last slot of the day. The room was incredibly warm and sweaty, but it was great to work with Tea directly. This day confirmed to me that he was meant to be a performer. Despite not being on stage, I felt like I could've been at a concert. This was the first time I could see a difference in Tea as a person and as a performer, and how he could switch between them. Now we had broken the ice, it felt like we could speak as friends rather than just professionally.



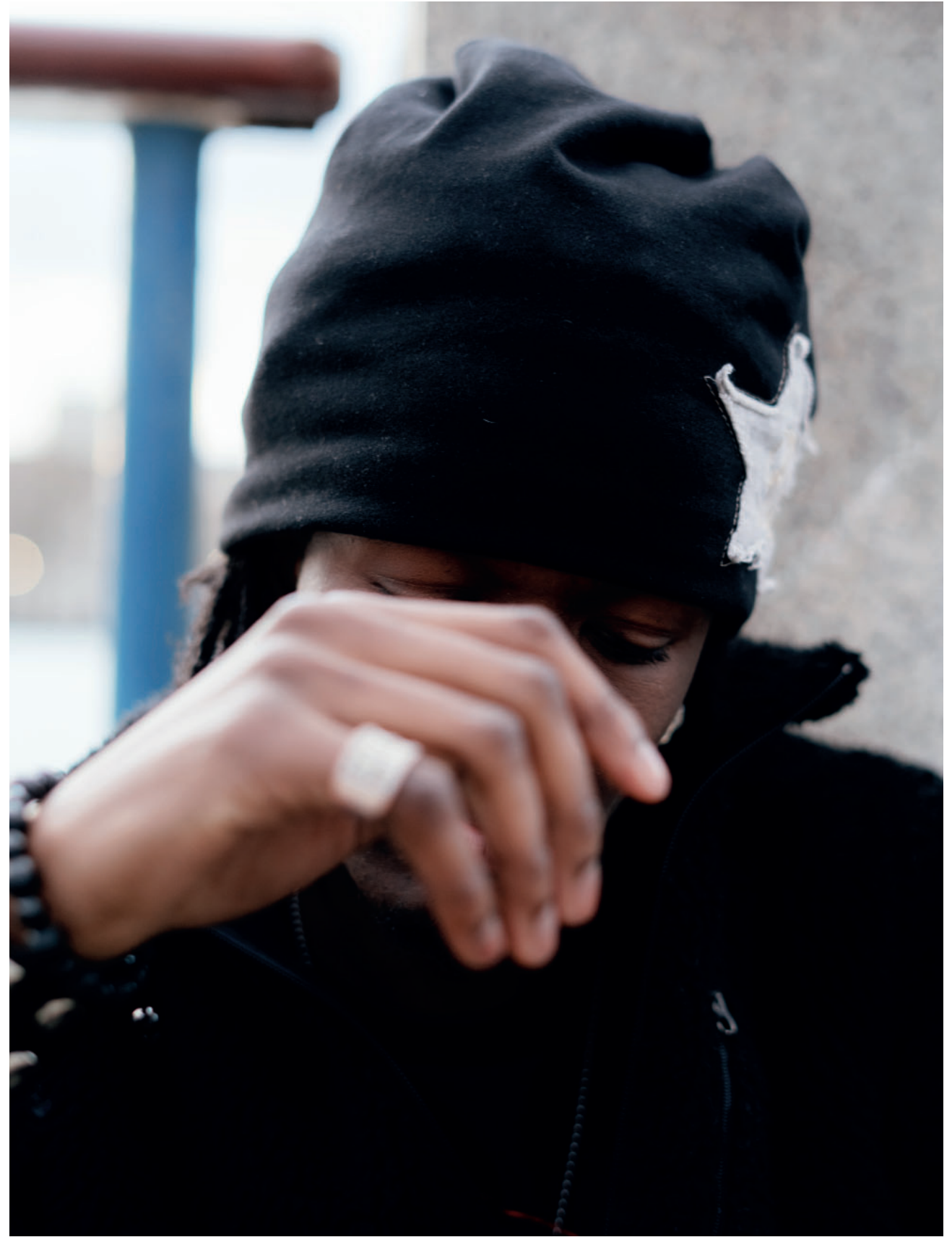
In the last weeks of the year, I reached out to Tea to ask if he'd be up for being my sole subject for the project I was working on. I wanted to document and spend time with an artist intensively off-stage, until at least May 2026. He filled in the form I sent to him very quickly and was the perfect fit.

Tea replied saying that he's still happy to be a part of the project and also messaged: "Last night G dropped me so I'm no longer managed by him" "So if there's anything regarding me just come to me <3"

This came as a shock to me. I knew that they'd worked together for a long time and wasn't sure what could have changed. Hearing the news from Tea first meant I heard 'his side' first, although it didn't answer many questions.

I mentioned to Georges that Tea had told me this news. He didn't speak about it much.

I've tried to take a neutral stand on the situation, because I have been working with both parties since they stopped working together. It's been difficult to figure out how to feel about Tea and Georges no longer working together, as I still hear from them both. Having worked with them both over a long period of time, I can see how they clash, but also how they would have successfully worked together for so many years.





At the start of the new year, I met with Tea in person for the first time since confirming he would be involved in the project. We decided to meet in London, (near Waterloo station) as he would be visiting his sister later in the day. I arrived early and soon realised we'd chosen the one day and venue where there were hundreds of preschool aged children attending an event. When we eventually found each other, we found a place to sit and caught up. We hadn't seen each other since before Christmas so there was a lot to chat about. We took a walk around the area, occasionally taking some photos.

Tea spoke about his family and some of the issues that he'd been dealing with. It sounded heavy. It felt heartwarming that Tea trusted me enough to talk so openly. There was a moment when Tea was speaking about his family that felt like I was talking to someone different. This wasn't the tmdistant I knew so far. It felt like there was someone soft and introspective under his tough exterior.

I was already photographing Tea as he opened up but gave him the chance to talk without feeling the camera positioned on him. I took a single photo afterwards while he looked away into the distance, seeming to process what was going on for him in his personal life.

We discussed the dates we would meet up again in the future. Our schedules clashed somewhat, which made it harder to see Tea as frequently as I would have liked, but the project was still possible.



When I visited Tea at his house for the first time, I travelled from Guildford to Basildon. He picked me up to finish the journey. I remember waiting at the station trying to figure out which car was his, but I soon realised when I heard music blaring as a car pulled up. Tea was in a great mood; he seemed excited and energetic – exactly what I needed after being sat on trains for almost 3 hours.

On the drive to his house, I remember telling Tea, “this place is so strange, it’s so big but there’s just a whole lot of nothing.” This was my first time in Essex, let alone his hometown.

He showed me around his home before taking me to the studio, a converted cinema room in the back garden. It felt cosy. Not untidy, but clearly lived in. I felt comfortable there. “It’s the best part about this house, I picked this house because of it,” he told me.

Within a few minutes of being in the studio, Tea played me some of his newer unreleased music. It reminded me why I chose to work with him. I always knew Tea was passionate about music, but now I could feel and hear his love for it even more.

I travelled with Tea to collect his friend Remy from the nearest tube station. On the ride there, we spoke about what it’s like for Tea to no longer be under management. “I’ve never really had to figure this shit out on my own, and holy fuck, what a blessing I had for a good few years.”



Tea made me dinner - steak, potatoes and salad. I felt a lot of love in the meal – Tea told me he always enjoys cooking, especially for the people he loves. “I gotta cook for my boys.”

Tea showed me his bedroom. It feels completely different to his studio. It’s a smaller room, so there’s less space for belongings, but it seems like Tea left some of his personality behind in the studio space. He keeps his clothes and shoes in his room, so it’s still obvious that it’s his bedroom, but there’s very little other decorations or furniture. I saw two stuffed toys on his bed and asked about them.

“This is my goat, I took him to Germany.” He got the teddy, who he named Milo, for his girlfriend who gave it back when they broke up. He also introduced me to Randolph, who he had for around five years.





Tea walked me through how he chooses an outfit before he took me with him to a jungle rave event in Brixton. It's clear that Tea takes a lot of pride in his clothing. He has a reason for every outfit and every accessory. I felt a little out of place next to him, as I'm the type of person to recycle an outfit hundreds of times just because it works and it's comfortable.



Before the event, Tea met up with some more friends for drinks in a Wetherspoons. Despite my willingness to talk to anyone, I find it incredibly anxiety inducing to do so. Tea was very extroverted at this point, exactly what I would expect from tmdistant. The boldest and most energetic person in the room. In this ring of friends was a mix of people I wouldn't have expected would hang out together, but all brought together through their love of music. In this way, I felt like I belonged, despite the nerves of talking to so many new people in an environment where everyone but me was drinking. Regardless of the madness, I felt a close eye on me from Tea and Remy to ensure I was comfortable and safe with my camera.

These eyes drifted when there were women around.

Before we entered the venue, we had to get through the queue. The boys knew the headlining DJ and took the opportunity to skip the queue. Even when I skip queues at concerts to collect a photo pass, I feel guilty, so the complaints shouted at us from the back of the queue hit hard. The boys were unphased. Perhaps this is normal to them. I don't think it helped that I was one of few women in the queue. I was squished and thrown around in a mix of people before we could even get inside. My camera took a beating, as did the backs of my legs, before we finally made it inside.

When I made it inside, it confirmed to me that raves were not my thing. I enjoyed the music, but as the night progressed, I saw less of Tea and more of his friends. I'm still not sure what he was up to, but maybe it's best I don't know.

I left the event early. We had originally planned that I would meet up with Tea in Brixton the following morning, but his plans changed and he would be heading back to Basildon instead. I had already arranged to spend the night in London and didn't have the money to buy another train ticket back to his house. I made my way home in the morning instead and heard back from Tea later that evening. I assume it was a heavy night.





I LOVE...

~~LOVE~~ LOVE xxx

I miss my ex. She <sup>reminds</sup> ~~reminds~~ me  
of a version of life where pain was the  
first thing and the last thing I  
feel everyday.

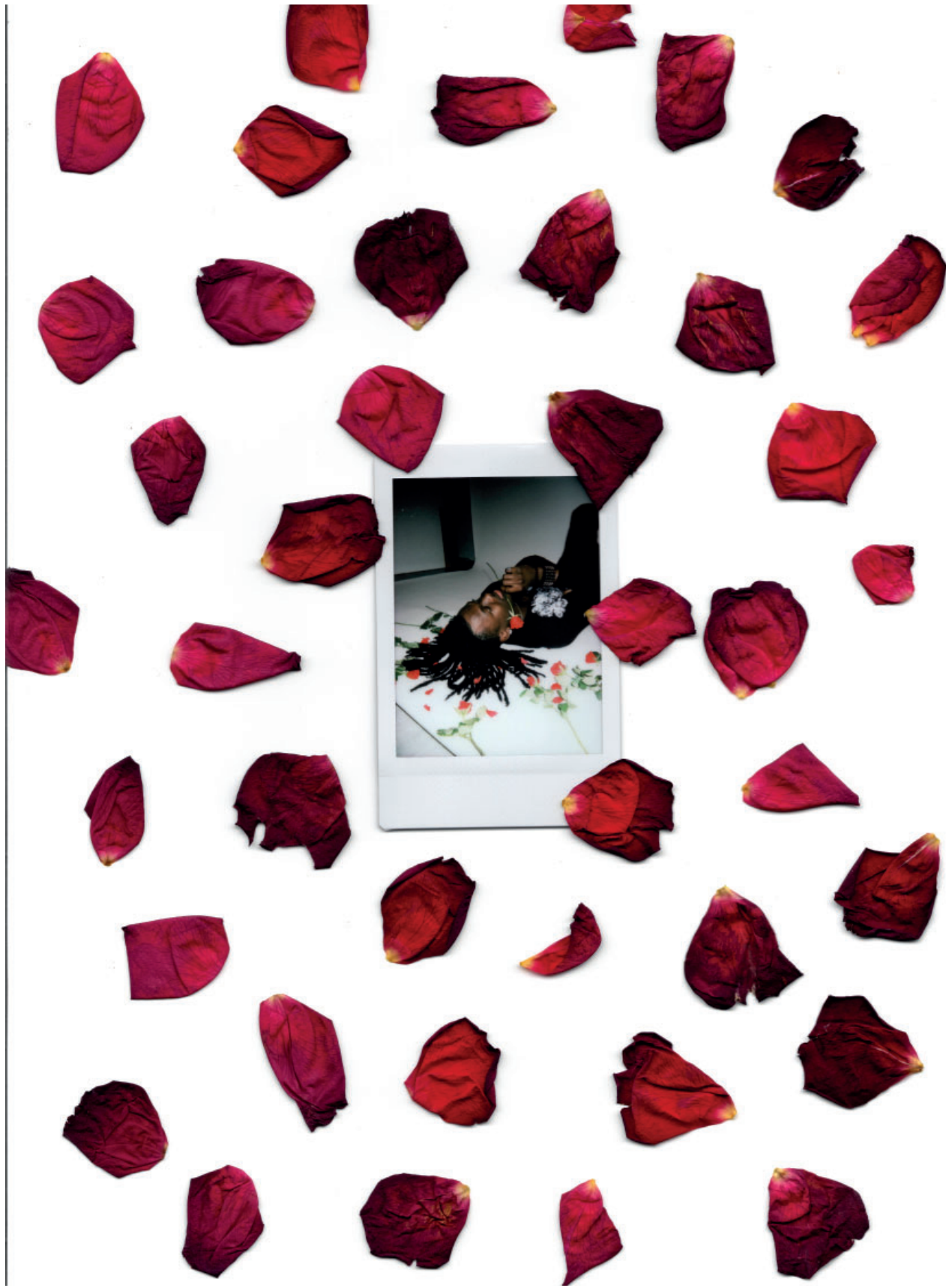
I don't like being  
promiscuous.

Is this all I'm  
worth?

I want to be  
accepted.

But it's  
the only way  
I feel loved  
by someone isn't  
forced to love  
me.





Ted has an abundance of vices.

Women has to be my most destructive one. Nothing good comes from it and I know it yet I can't help myself but continuously (I can't spell) chase them LOL. I hate myself.

I never met Tea's ex, but I feel like I have gotten to know her over the last six months of working with him.

"I actually miss this girl, cuz like, shit is different without her. In a good way and in a bad way. It's weird to be so alone, and then it's also weird to be happy to be alone."

"Yeah, but you get over it in the end. Eventually, I think. I dunno if- I'm definitely not over it." He laughs.





Tea previously told me his lyrics don't always mean something and that he just writes them. I would argue it's the opposite. I admire the way Tea can form lyrics and melodies to songs. In many of his songs, especially the unreleased tracks I've heard, I notice lyrics that feel too convenient to not have meaning. After speaking with him for some time, the lines about love, relationships and alcohol stand out to me.

Is life worth  
anything if love  
isn't real?





During the project, I invited Tea to the photography studio. He made the journey from Basildon to Farnham, and was distraught to hear there were no chicken shops or fast food options in the town.

He had been at work that morning, so I'm grateful that Tea stayed at the studio for the rest of his day.

Tea let me know he was feeling sad on this day. This was a first. It was a genuine short message, "I sad today :(“ and for the first time it got straight to the point.





Tea took me bowling with his friends Remy and Enzo, dubbed by Tea as “the three musketeers.” It was sweet that they included me as one of their own. I was terrible but had a great time. Tea confidently started the night with “Let’s get straight to it,” entirely missing every pin on his first shot.

The trio then moved to play pool, where there was plenty of friendly competition. I didn’t join in this time as I didn’t want to embarrass myself after the bowling, but I enjoyed watching them and their dynamic.

The boys wanted to get food afterwards, and decided on pizza. During the wait for the pizza, Tea spoke with the boys about issues he’s been having with a girl. He scrolled through his messages with the girl to tell me what was happening. Remy tried to take a look at his phone screen, but Tea was adamant nobody else would be reading the messages.

When we arrived back to the house, Tea’s mum was home. This was the first time I met her. She was very welcoming and happy to have me in her home. She was cooking food and offered some to me to try. I see where Tea gets his love for cooking from.

I planned to stay at Tea’s house for this night, to experience what it was truly like to live in Tea’s home. He set up a sofa with a duvet and pillow in the living room, where I would have privacy and not be disturbed. I called it a night around 2am, but I heard the boys going strong until around 5am. They may act tough but they did love having a late night and a sleepover.

When I woke up the next morning, Tea and his boys had already been up for a couple of hours. I don’t know how they run on such little sleep so frequently. Tea made me breakfast – eggs on toast – whilst taking a phone call. His mum had ordered a new bed, but the delivery company didn’t install it. It was now his problem to fix.

Tea drove me back to the nearest tube station, Upminster, where I could take a cheaper journey home.



Bottom line  
Here is...  
I ~~love~~ love  
my friends.









I met with Tea before going to work with another band at their gig. I needed my second camera which I had left with him, but it gave us a chance to catch up and take some photos. It was helpful that Tea was flexible with his plans, he saved me some time by meeting me at the venue for the gig I was photographing. Despite not having enough money to make the journey to meet me in London, he found a way to make it work so I wasn't without my camera.

Tea told me about his mum giving him things to do, to help her around the house or to run errands. He has mentioned a few times that it's sometimes inconvenient timing, but that he does want to be there to help his mum because there aren't many other people around to do these things for her.

It feels like I've been slowly breaking down the wall Tea has up. He seems extroverted, confident and almost arrogant on the surface, but hearing small things about his personal life and his family has shown me a different side that he seems to keep hidden. He didn't need to go out of his way to help me out, but he did without me asking him to. He's dropped his plans to help his mum with errands. He's bought and made me food while I've stayed with him. There's no necessity to do these things and while they are kind gestures, I feel like this behaviour is Tea, not tmdistant.



I didn't reach out to Tea for a little while. I had a lot to manage in February; I think this was the first time I had burnt out a little bit with the project. I checked in with Tea, and he got back to me later in the week sharing he'd also "been recalibrating".

Eventually we spoke on the phone to catch up. It had been around a month since Tea and I had met in person, and I felt some distance between us. I enjoyed speaking with Tea, he has a way of making me feel excitable and positive. I think this is partly why I have enjoyed working with him. When Tea is in a good mood, I'm in a good mood. He brings out the playful side to me that feels like the kind of silly childhood joy I would feel with friends growing up. Maybe being just eight months apart in age brings us together – we both experienced similar stages of our lives at similar times.



I don't think we would have ever met without the shared interest of music. Our lifestyles are completely different. I grew up in a small town in Kent, he grew up in London. I have a small circle of close friends, he seems to know everyone in the building (although he has joked that he has "no friends" because he is only close with "his boys").

We do share similarities. We are both quite introverted until we get to know people. We both had school interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. We both spend far too much time on social media and our phones, and we often joke about the same things.





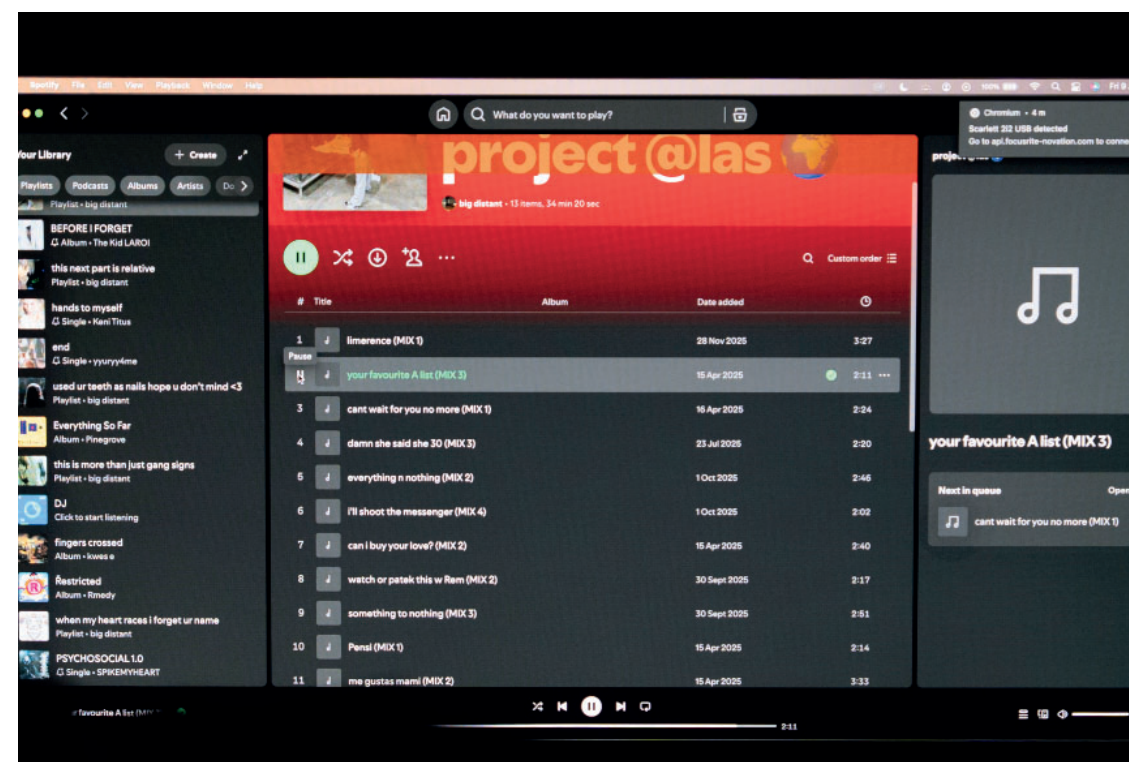
There's always music playing around Tea, whether it's in the studio, in the kitchen or in the car. When Tea drives, he is usually listening to his own music. He is definitely his biggest fan.

"There's nobody that loves me more than me," he told me. "But I'm so realistic in a sense of, like, I know when I make bullshit, and I know when something's good. Even, like, in my day-to-day life, I know when I'm doing the wrong thing and I'm choosing to do the wrong thing." He laughs. "I be knowing, I'm not gonna lie."

"I definitely deserve every single bad thing that's ever happened to me. [he laughs] ... I've never been oblivious to the fact that I can be a terrible person, but I feel like we all pretend that we're not terrible sometimes ... Everybody is terrible, but I feel like people are not honest about who's terrible in themselves. They never wanna be the problem. I feel like that's what it is. I'm so happy to be the problem."

When I speak to Tea about more serious things, he tends to joke around and use humour more. I get the sense that there are things eating Tea up a lot more than he would care to admit, but 'tmdistant' wouldn't talk about this.

Tea told me he is a "chronic ghoster", which I have experienced at times. It has only been a problem when I need something from him and he disappears. "I gotta do it before they do it to me," he explained. I would argue this applies to more areas of Tea's life than just messaging.





At the start of April, I met Tea's sister, Biz. It had been a few weeks of arranging and rearranging dates, but eventually we sat down together in the garden of her north London home to chat. She lives with her son- Tea's nephew- and multiple cats, although I only saw two when I visited. Besides Tea's home, this was the only other personal space he had invited me to. I asked Biz some questions about Tea, his earlier years, and her thoughts on the project.

I started with asking Biz how she would describe Tea to someone who has never met him before. "A character. Definitely a typical Bankole family member. Cut from the same cloth." I could definitely see their similarities. Tea described himself as a carbon copy of his sister.

"He's fun, he's a bit of an eccentric character, as you can see. I'm sure you would already know. But what's funny is it's like two extremes. He's, like, eccentric and ridiculously normal and boring at the same time." She goes on to tell me that Tea would happily visit her to just watch a film and chill out.

Biz goes on to tell me that Tea always wanted to be involved in music. He grew up in a very musical family; there were a lot of instruments in the home. Biz used to take Tea out with her friends to busk. She told me he would earn them more money, because people loved to see a four year old beatboxing. Their dad was also very musical, "He loved to sing and dance," Tea added. The pair laughed about how often their dad would play R. Kelly's 'I Believe I Can Fly' when they were younger.

Tea asks if Biz remembers when their dad bought him a drum kit. "Everyone in the village remembers when you had a drum kit!" He explains to me, "I had a drum kit when I was younger, Dad took it away from me as soon as he gave it to me. It was just awful, it was just noise."





When I asked if Tea has any bad habits, Biz couldn't think of any, but she did tell Tea that his tendency to suddenly scream or make noises "is actually weird, just letting you know, it's odd." We all laughed, knowing exactly what she was talking about. The best way I could describe it is that Tea has his own built-in sound effects. Tea told us that as tmdistant, he wouldn't do this, but Biz and I agreed that when he's on stage he absolutely would.

On a more serious note, Biz told me that when Tea is stressed or sad, he becomes quite dismissive and careless. It's clear that there's frustration, but he wouldn't tell anyone unless they dig it out from him. Tea feels comfortable enough to talk to Biz about the more serious or heavy parts of life. They have a very honest relationship and are glad to be so close with one another. "He knows I absolutely love him, and I won't be afraid to tell him the truth, or tell him my opinion, or tell him what I think he should be doing. But I also won't come down hard on him and be like 'ugh that's terrible.' I'm not his parent; I'm his big sis. Which means he will get the hard lessons, but he'll also get the 'okay, now go and drink juice from my fridge.'"

Biz seems like the calm Tea needs in his life. She gives him advice on how to manage situations when he's living in the moment too much and helps to keep him grounded.

Tea: "My sister's one of the biggest things that keeps my head not in the sky-"

Biz: "Because trust me, if it gets up there, I'll be like 'get down.'"

Tea told us that he likes to be predictable enough that the people close to him can assume where to find him. In this way, I think I have become quite close with Tea, because I've learnt some of his routine patterns. Most notably, that he usually visits Biz on Sundays.





My sis is the reason I  
make music tbh.

She walked so I could run.  
For as long as I can remember, ~~to~~  
she was rapping. So, to be honest I'm  
not suprised I ended up here.







During the project, I visited my hometown for Easter. Thankfully this was closer to Tea's house than Guildford. We planned to meet at Bluewater Shopping Centre, roughly the middle point between our homes. I travelled via train and Tea met me at the station, where he picked me up to drive the rest of the way to Bluewater. We laughed about how empty the local area was compared to our hometowns.

At one point we joked that I shop in the men's section for all my clothing, and he buys a lot of his from the women's section. Tea found a women's shirt in Urban Outfitters that he loved. He tried it on in the changing room and I could instantly feel the joy and confidence he had with it on. I think Tea could style and pull off any clothing. Unlike most of his wardrobe, this shirt was red. A faded, almost pink colour, but still more colour than his typical outfits. I get the impression that Tea enjoys the process of shopping, whereas I shop out of necessity. For one of the first times, I enjoyed my time in a shopping centre without making any purchases for myself.

The next day Tea recorded a video and was in the best mood I had seen from him across the six months we'd spent together. This was also the day he wore the most colourful outfit I'd seen him wear, including the "cropped little, red little, tight little shirt" he bought with me the day before. It came as no surprise to me when Tea said he was about to meet up with "the potential new girlfriend," someone he had mentioned to me before. It's clear to me that Tea values the people around him, from family to friends and everyone else in between.

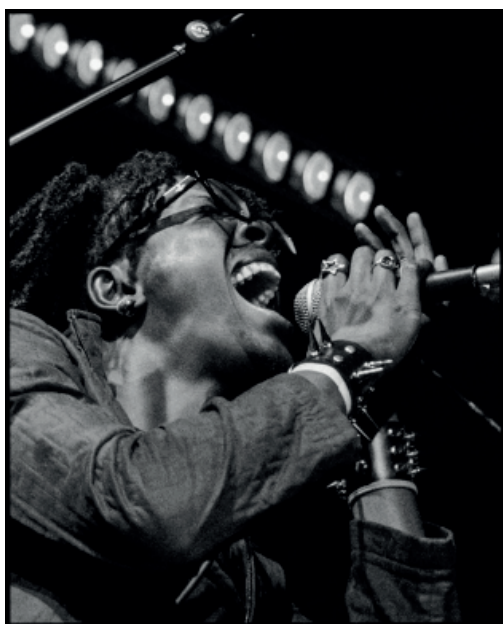


Tea told me he had been arrested during the time we were working together. I was shocked, but not entirely surprised. The news felt unexpected, yet not out of character. When I asked what had happened, he said he couldn't talk about it. I chose not to push further. Part of me didn't want to know, in case it shifted my understanding of him.

There are still things I don't have access to. This is one of them.









Now that I've reached the end of the six-month period we spent together, I feel like I have a better – but not complete – understanding of who Tea is. The process has been intense for both of us. I imagine that for Tea, having everyday moments documented carries a certain mental weight. In a similar way, I found it demanding to remain so present, and then to revisit those same moments through images, notes and recordings.

This isn't a complete documentation of Tea. It's just what I was able to see, and what he allowed me to be part of. Ultimately, everything Tea shows me is curated; even when it feels natural, we are all always performing in some way. Equally, the content I have chosen to include in this book is curated to represent my time with Tea.

Over time, the distance between us shifted. What began as observation became something more familiar and personal. There's a level of trust and closeness now that didn't exist at the beginning. But even with this access, there are still parts of Tea (and tmdistant as a character) that remain out of reach, or that I don't fully understand. I probably never will.



“I actually feel like this all happened at a great time, because when I make it, this footage is going to be priceless.”



