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Taking Risks NEO HÜLCKER in Conversation with EPHEMERAL RIFT

Editors' Note: [Ephemeral Rift](#) is a publisher of ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) videos on YouTube. He currently has over 350,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel, and his videos have more than 130 million views.

When and how did you discover ASMR?

ER: I've had ASMR all my life. But as far as YouTube is concerned, I didn't know the ASMR genre/medium existed when I first started out. I had a very small channel with a dozen videos and one of them was (still on my channel) a scene of leaves flowing in a creek along with some Native American Flute music that I played and recorded. Another smaller ASMR creator saw this video and asked if they could use it for an ASMR project. I said to myself "ASMR!? What is that!? Is this a joke!? Are you trying to steal my work!!!! (sarcasm)". I then looked it up, realized it's the thing I've been experiencing all my life, found the videos, and the rest is history!

Do you have a favourite ASMR-trigger? Which one?

ER: That's almost like asking "What is my favorite song?" ;-). But I will say that I prefer whispering and the personal attention aspect mixed with art and creativity. I do still enjoy traditional ASMR videos, as some creators I follow make only those kind. But I prefer the more creative and artistic, experimental videos that incorporate ASMR and film elements.

Do you improvise in your videos or do you have a clear plan beforehand? Do you have a script?

ER: I love to improvise. I never script, mostly because I'm too lazy, and because the improvisation appears to work. And that's what I've done ever since I was a kid: making up bad jokes! Sure, scripting would help, but I also don't have that kind of time, not with a family and full time job. I plan everything in my head the same day or a day before, sometimes hours

before, depending on the idea and what my intuition tells me to do. Sometimes I make a few talking points on a piece of paper and put it somewhere in reach, but that is the rare occasion.

Did you start perceiving your environment in a different way after you started to do ASMR-videos?

ER: Usually only if I'm looking for props, but not always for ASMR purposes. I like going to vintage sales and flea markets to buy something new to use as an ASMR prop, like a pickaxe or a vintage camera that might have nice sounding moving parts. But I also think about environment aesthetics and creating a stage set. A lot of my inspiration comes from great shows like Monty Python or local cable access shows where they always had weird and interesting stage sets. I try to do the same thing in my videos from time to time. And in case you're wondering, I do not have any experience whatsoever in drama classes, film, etc. I never even went to college. The closest I ever got to drama was reading Shel Silverstein's poem "The Unicorn" in front of my 6th or 7th grade elementary peers, and doing it horribly!

Do people recognize you on the street because they've seen your videos?

ER: I only know of 2 occasions when someone has come up to me in person when I was out with the family. They were very kind and it was just very casual. I don't know if anyone else has ever seen me.

Which role does irony play in your work? Can it be called irony or is it something else?

ER: I think there might be some irony. For one, I never had a problem sleeping, so I don't need ASMR videos for that unlike many ASMR viewers that do. I do have anxiety myself from time to time, mostly social. Although it has gotten much better by being in the workplace, getting in front of the camera and being a father. Speaking of being a father, there's some more irony for you when it comes to some of the videos I make that one wouldn't expect to come from a "father". There's probably more irony, like how many people come to ASMR videos mainly for relaxation, peace and calm, yet here I am with Iggy Manley and Martha videos upsetting people who are easily offended and not expecting to see those characters! Though that's probably more juxtaposition than irony, which I love as well. I love ambiguity, being non-conformist, unorthodox, going against the grain, etc. etc.

Could your videos be described as a kind of artistic research into the human?

ER: I think so, absolutely, but not because I do it for that reason directly. I think the ASMR medium as a whole speaks volumes about how people work

too much, are stressed out at school, deal with various mental health issues, etc. etc. I think that's why a lot of us are all here. Sure, there are plenty of folks without those issues. I don't know what the percentage is, and I don't think having to know that is of any importance. But it's definitely interesting to think about. I also think there's some correlation between ASMR and being a "Highly Sensitive Person", but I'm no expert.

Where do you find inspiration?

ER: Everything, everyone and everywhere. Like Jim Jarmusch said: "Nothing is original. Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination. Devour old films, new films, music, books, paintings, photographs, poems, dreams, random conversations, architecture, bridges, street signs, trees, clouds, bodies of water, light and shadows. Select only things to steal from that speak directly to your soul. If you do this, your work (and theft) will be authentic. Authenticity is invaluable; originality is non-existent. " I don't intend to steal ideas. I just take everything in. That's who I am. Everything comes in, gets stirred around in my mind, and I regurgitate it. ;-)

Did you enjoy role-play / dress-up in your childhood? Is there a connection between that time and what you are doing now in your videos?

ER: I think every single person still has that child inside. We only pile stuff on top of him/her as we grow up, often smothering that child in the process, but they are still there, and for the most part I don't think we ever really change. But yes, I used to play-act a lot, whether it was bursting open the flannel shirt snap buttons pretending I was the hulk, or throwing a blanket around pretending I was Spiderman, to making up terrible jokes with bad punchlines. I do the same thing today. The only difference is that I'm biologically older!

Many of the many ASMR videos of women whispering softly into the camera come close to something like soft-pornographic wellness. What do you think about them? Would you like the scene to be more creative and open for experimentation?

ER: I would have to kindly disagree. I don't think it's a lot. I think they may be more popular because there is a market to fill. I think the question to ask, with all due respect, would be "Why is there a market?" Just like with porn and hentai. I think that speaks volumes about society as a whole. I know plenty of female creators that make videos that don't fit that category. Also, to each their own! And yes, I would love to see more people push the creative envelope and be more experimental. Not just for selfish reasons, but for their own benefit! Nothing is more thrilling and rewarding than taking a risk, even if it fails. You will learn from it, and you will grow. You learn a lot about yourself that way. I've been taking risks all my life, even physically, like

jumping out of a tree as a kid to climbing on my roof to clean the gutters. It's scary as hell, but once you do it, you learn so much about yourself. Just like getting on camera for the first time. As Nietzsche once said: "That which does not kill us, only makes us stronger" and that could not be any further from the truth.

What do you say about the discussion that ASMR is a sexual trigger?

ER: Most videos are not. Someone playing an ASMR gaming walk-through or eating food is probably not being sexual. But someone making an intentional ASMR video full of kissing sounds? You be the judge of that. Again: transmitter and receiver. Is the person creating the video being sexual? Is the person watching looking for arousal? Who can tell! Also, there are plenty of unintentional videos that generate ASMR that are not sexual, like people fixing things. Although, truth be told, there are so many fetishes these days, I'm sure an ASMR video on "How To Build A Model Airplane" could be a fetish to someone! I kid. Sort of. But I think the intentional videos where it is hard to tell if someone is being sexual are the ones that bring this topic into question. Well, who am, or you, or anyone to do anything about it? Again, see my answer to your previous question above. ;)

Do you think that ASMR has to be an online-phenomenon? Could you imagine a kind of a live-ASMR scene?

ER: I have tried to imagine live-ASMR, and I would love to try it. For example, picture what a magician or street performer does. How they often interact with a member of the audience. Also, I've thought about setting up a live-ASMR installation somehow, either just playing videos with headphones that people can put on, or me doing the performing as someone sits in a chair across from me. I am sure it can be done, and will be done, by someone, someday!

Neo Hülcker is a composer performer whose work focuses on music as anthropological research into everyday life environments. Their compositions evolve as situations, performance-installations, actions and interventions, and work with different kinds of public spaces.

Hülcker studied composition with Dieter Mack and Harald Muenz at Musikhochschule Lübeck, and with Manos Tsangaris and Franz Martin Olbrisch at Hochschule für Musik Carl Maria von Weber Dresden. They graduated with a Masters degree in 2013. In 2014 they have been a fellow of the Junge Akademie at the Akademie der Künste Berlin.

Hülcker founded the youtube channel feminist ASMR (in collaboration with Stella Veloce and Katie Lee Dunbar), as well as the channel ASMR studio berlin (in collaboration with mam.manufaktur für aktuelle Musik).

They perform as the ASMR artist Thousand Tingles and are a part of the agency ASMR yourself with whom they performed at HAU Berlin, PACT Zollverein, Akademie der Künste Berlin and Münchner Kammerspiele.

Their work has been performed by ensembles such as MOCREP, Ensemble ascolta, Ensemble Radar, mam. Manufaktur für aktuelle Musik, Ensemble Garage and decoder ensemble among others. Hülcker has collaborated with Antonia Baehr, Mario de Vega, Tomomi Adachi, Stellan Veloce, Lucie Vitkova, Andy Ingamells, Elisabeth Hager, Matthias Kaul, Astrid Schmeling, Eva Zöllner and Bastard Assignments. Their compositions have been performed at Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik, Wien Modern, London Contemporary Music Festival, Münchener Biennale, Blurred Edges Festival Hamburg, Frontiers Festival Birmingham, soundacts festival Athens, Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik Darmstadt, Klangwerkstatt Berlin and elsewhere.