



KINGS Artist-Run

Emerging Writers Program

caring and supportive funky kong gives you a ride home from the airport

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In 2007, a media phenomenon called ASMR emerged on YouTube and Reddit, responding to an emerging bodily effect that came from an altered attention to audiovisual stimuli, characterised by a “static-like or tingling sensation on the skin”. Triggered by gentle behaviours or specific ambient sounds in moving images, the response in certain individuals typically emerges on the scalp, moving down the back of the neck and upper spine, inducing deep relaxation, mild euphoria, or a restful sleep.

The content of ASMR videos is generated exclusively through an effect-oriented manner: typically a random output of content and props: The slow agitation of bean bags, sultry low voices spoken into microphones shaped into earlobes, role-playing as an overly affectionate flight attendant). Amongst nihilist memes and incognito browsing, ASMR’s emergence could be traced as a late capitalist by-product of turning one’s attention towards wellness and self-care in response to an increasing insecurity of an externally sanctioned sense of wellbeing.

These effects that are circulated within the ASMR following are filtered and ranked by consumption and activity volumes, collated by a community with a common interest of only ever increasing or prolonging this effect. These random data inputs operate in an unadulterated and formless wing of online content creation; yet to be fully monetized, transformed into a Netflix series, or appropriated for advertising revenue.

ASMR content is polarised by produced or found content. The binary is divided between the desire for direct and personal attention from regular uploaders (reassuring eye contact, affectionate hand movements) and from its unintentional presence in existing videos (a recipe involving careful, steady hands cutting open mochi, stock footage of a russian-american in 1998 smoking from a wooden pipe). The spontaneous and extremely niche data of ‘found’ ASMR is hard to uncover, as its effect is currently immune to YouTube algorithms. Instead its dispersion is operated by a large machine of exam-preparing students, PTSD sufferers and insomniacs, who aggregate within community forums that represent an analogue data-mine of slippery, gentle content.

The movement shifts along propelled by its users' generosity and confessional anecdotes condensing online content to its mere subjective experiences that layer between YouTube's automated targeting methods. The contents' popularity is based off of emotion and experience in itself, in attempt to try and peel back towards a revived sense of individual experience or a contemporary sublime through a collaborative shortcut. With such a mild and ostensibly deskilled outcome normally associated with other light entertainment, the movement is able to distance itself from most ethical debates surrounding labour and merit in content creation and its workers. It dodges scrutiny by neither allying itself with science or conspiracy, sex work or porn, therapy or entertainment.

Underlying the community instead is the privileging of lived experience, rather than existing knowledge and reasoning. The ASMR community reminds its users that sites of contemporary amelioration exist on either side of the binary between our coded remedies and experiential capacities. It destabilizes concreated notions of quietude appearing exclusively in nature or in 'disconnected' landscapes, removed sites normally attributed to the sublime or something else untouched by rampant culture-mining. The stream of soft voices weaves the outside in.