

CAMILLE WEINER Could you discuss the origins of the Hipnostasis collaboration?

YOSHUA OKON Raymond and I decided to go to past life regression therapy. We don't believe in past lives, but we thought it would trigger the imagination in an interesting way. After therapy we set out to shoot videos based on the characters that came up. Among the few we shot, one was about a hippie cult leader who I'd been in a past life. This character came to me based on Raymond's mentioning a ceremony where hippies eat newborns' umbilical cords. We looked at Venice Beach as having had a vibrant hippie subculture and how it has adapted to extreme transformations. We ended up finding a group who had been there since the early seventies. The idea was for the location to operate in micro as much as in a macro way; to simultaneously convey very universal questions as well as the specifics of a place and time.

RAYMOND PETTIBON Some of the people you see in the finished work are from bits of the early footage which was shot without a script. What we came up with in the end was much more succinct and really beautiful. We were able to work some of the local history and context behind those images; references to the Venice of the sixties and seventies are so deeply embedded, despite how it has changed quite a bit.

YO That's how Hipnostasis came about, it's a piece about the passing of time.

ANDREW BERARDINI Nothing is timeless; as much as these guys are part of what's left over from the sixties and seventies, they're not going to be around forever.

RP Yeah, well that's a valid history. I can speak for myself, I'm not either.

AB Yoshua makes it clear they are beach bums rather than bums, which is something different.

RP I don't have a problem with the terminology particularly. Most of those guys are pretty industrious and there are worse places to live in the world where you don't have a steady job with business attire and mortgages. It's much less of a parasitical lifestyle than it is on Wall Street or at the public till.

AB It's kind of beautiful that these guys chose to pull out of the rat race and have stuck to it for thirty years.

RP Speaking to some of them that was the case. People do drop out of the rat race for whatever reason. Some career you are born into, you go to school, get a job, and so forth.

YO Who is not fed up with our glorious civilization, with all its counterproductive regulations and inherent corruption? Who does not sometimes feel like giving it all up and moving to a deserted island?

CW How do you stay and negotiate reality? There are these moments when misfits come together under pretty open ideas; as in these guys on the beach or in the early days of punk, they helped each other negotiate reality without having to compromise.

RP Inevitably though, the counter culture will tend toward having the same problems. When you try to remake human nature, whether it's evolutionary or something that has been instilled, you have to remake the basic relationship; within family or sexual or dealing with commerce or education. That doesn't go down very often. People go kicking and screaming until you have to have a really ironclad reinforcing of it, which means executions and imprisonments and reeducation encampments. Even the prison system will have its own very distinct social relationships, but they won't be that different from outside the walls.

CW How does your work and what you do on your own relate to what you've done in this collaboration?

RP Technically speaking, my work is still the image and the words. If one had to make the connection more explicit you could look at some of these images as storyboards. They're scripts or sometimes the words and images don't happen all at once or with an idea of what we get in the end. I do the same with my drawings. So that's what happened in this case. Coming from such an abused medium as drawing and quasi-comics, I didn't anticipate anything going awry in this working relationship. I trusted Yoshua to chart what we did best because we both work with images and words. One thing about drawing, there's not all this convoluted taking meetings and making sure everyone's happy, the cast, the production, and all that. But that wasn't the case in this work.

YO For sure, to me non-conventional documentary forms have the great potential of making us question both media's veracity as well as our notions of reality which are, more often than not, based on conventions and cultural conditioning as opposed to observation and critical thinking.

AB In addition to the work you did together, there are two pieces by each of you individually. Whether accidentally or with forethought, everything really came together; like the tombstones and this idea that these guys seem to be in this in between waiting space. So much of Beckett's work is about waiting and consciousness. Like in *Happy Days*, the light is always on, and for this video there's no reprieve from the sun.

RP That's why people tend to come here or retire here. With Beckett its kind of insidious as if he's playing with an ant farm. Those guys on the beach weren't put on the spot like that, they were eating, no one was challenging them to justify their existence or their existential being or asking them to jump through hoops. Compared to Yoshua's images, my own are kind of like drawing litter; it's certainly a different look.

YO I see the writing as Raymond's stream of consciousness as it relates to his experience growing up in Southern California's beach culture. Raymond, in many ways, was witness to the transformations I referred to.

CW Both of your singular works touch on the theme of death, the torn tombstones and flashing 'Dead End' disappearing into itself; is it meant to be looked at lightly or tragicomic?

YO Tragicomic is closer to what I intend. Life brings both suffering and enjoyment, and I think that when looking at art we have the distance to simultaneously think about both sides of the coin.

RP Yeah, I can see that. There's a whole fusion of words compared to that. Beyond relying on them at all, I wouldn't make an early judgement on that level, but there is, for whatever reason, a part of me that would aspire to that.

This text is excerpted from multiple conversations between

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