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Curation of an Exhibition

Self-transcendence and its importance in the modern world

Self-transcendence can be explained in simple terms as the realisation that we are one small part of the greater whole. The greater whole can be a divine power in religion, the universe and even nature. It is the idea that there is a power above us. In life we naturally search for self-transcendence. In the past religion was the popular key to self-transcendence, God was able to enlighten peoples lives. Despite the decline in organised religion, the majority of Britain still believe in the power of spiritual forces (BBC News, 2013).

To further explore the ideas of self-transcendence, I have chosen to curate an interactive exhibition that aims to create a sense of self-transcendence through the creation of art. The aim is to create a sense of higher belonging and unity to the universe or even society. The exhibition will remove the participant from their everyday mundane tasks and create a sense of community between random strangers. The exhibition will be displayed in the SA1 Waterfront area. I have chosen SA1 as it is a hub for workers going about their commutes, students traveling to university and everyday people enjoying the entertainment.

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim believed that religion was separated into the sacred and the profane. The profane is our everyday lives that don't have deeper means such as jobs (*Religion, evolution, and the ecstasy of self-transcendence*, 2012). The sacred is the higher level to our existence. The function of religion is to unite us into a group or moral movement, this is the purpose of the sacred. "Anything that unites us takes on an air of sacredness" (Jonathan Haidt, 2012). As we get higher into self-transcendence, self-interest decreases, and we gain a sense of morality.

In the modern-day world, we are confining ourselves to the profane level. Kevin J. Vanhoozer discusses that Post-moderns suffer not from over sensation, as is commonly thought, but from desensitization, an anaesthesia of the spirit. He discusses how it is hard to find passion for life and death in the modernist society. Art can be used as an escapism "because art, like religion, can act as the peoples opiate, distracting

them from situations that cry out for social justice” (Vanhoozer, 2012, p.128).

Working, studying and entertainment activities are at the heart of the profane level. For the exhibition there will be 20 canvases that create a bigger picture. Each canvas is completed by a different person, the canvases are then combined to create one united piece. This will visualise the idea of a united community. Self-transcendence can be achieved through the process of making art. Art is a form of escapism. By creating the individual pieces with the knowledge that they will become one, the relationships between strangers are more than surface level. Interactive exhibitions have the power to engage the audience and provoke thoughts amongst the participants and audience.

In Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs he describes self-actualization as achieving your full potential. This is at the top of the triangle above, self-esteem and love/belonging. You cannot move to self-actualisation without completing the lower levels. In his later years he altered the triangle to place self-transcendence at the top. “Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (Maslow, 1971, p. 269).

By placing self-transcendence above self-actualisation, it shows a higher meaning to our lives that goes above fulfilling our own potential. It goes above our own individual egos and creates a sense of unity. This exhibition centres around the ideas of unity and social interactions that go above self-interest.

There are some obvious dangers to the exhibition. The exhibitions success is crucial to the participation levels. If spectators do not join the exhibition there will be a blank canvas. However, the success or failure can also reflect the theory. If the canvas remains blank, then self-transcendence is not being achieved in modern society. The exhibition also faces limitations when considering the time of day. In the morning workers will be too busy to stop and participate, whilst in the evening the public will not want to take the time out of their entertainment. These factors will impact the results of the exhibition, to higher the interest the exhibition will be manned and advertised on social media. The campaign

will be shared on twitter and Facebook as the algorithms make it easier to go viral faster. With the word spreading via social media there is hope for an audience to watch the artwork being created.

I decided against using existing artwork as this would influence the ideas of the audience. The audience could either choose to partner as a team to create the artwork or work individually. Again, this will explore how observant and considerate the team are. I have chosen to use a blank canvas as it creates intrigue. Self-transcendence could also be explored through religious artwork. The problem with this is the idea of preaching to an mostly atheist society. By letting society have more control they can explore their ideas without being confined. It can be argued that the idea of self-transcendence has negative implications. Religious extremism focuses on the idea of being united in the movement. In this aspect of the idea of self-transcendence, I have attempted to focus on the idea of society as a united community and focus less on the religious interpretation. However, due to the nature of spirituality it can be interpreted in whatever way the participant sees fit. Self-transcendence should not just be about religion but also community. I don't want to limit the thought process to focus on a small area of the bigger idea.

Below I have included an image on the space I will use. The courtyard is facing the bridge which is used by commuters and students. There will be three Perspex boards that will hold the canvases each 20 canvas will be a3 in size. The materials to create the artwork will be a combination of paints, coloured pencils and chalk. There are no rules to what can be used. I have chosen three workstations as an exhibition is a collection of work not just one piece. This also gives the opportunity for versatile visuals.

An outside location represents freedom in the city. There is more inspiration from an outside setting in comparison to a blank museum. The main goal for this project is to create a community exhibition. Due to self-transcendence being a feeling, it is harder to manipulate the end goal of the exhibition. Every member of society has different thoughts and emotions. Self-transcendence can be achieved by multiple avenues, the meaning I have followed in this exhibition is to overcome the individual's self-interests. The outside space has the downfall of being too distractive. Could the audience become less interested in the exhibition? In a modernistic world where we are constantly lost in our

phones, this exhibition will create relationships between strangers who would've overlooked each other. I used art as it united all cultures and religious beliefs without judgement.

In advertising we use Maslow's hierarchy, this exhibition will visualise and question parts of his original theory that were missing.

In the past the arts have been influenced by religion for centuries, sculptures and paintings have traditionally been used for depicting religious narratives. Traditionally these narratives have given meaning and validity to faith. In the modern world this is not the case. Art doesn't always have to have contextual meaning. I hope that with the help of social media this exhibition will make society question their deeper purpose in the universe.

Imagine a space where we question our beliefs and delve deeper into the world of faith within ourselves. This is the aim of my exhibition.



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(*The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Maslow, New York, 1971, p. 269.)