

HIDDEN PEAKS

R. M. Haas

*who gets to touch reality
who gets to just hear about it*

*who gets the freshest air
who donates their time to the past*

*when do we hear the results
when do we get to know*

who won and who lost

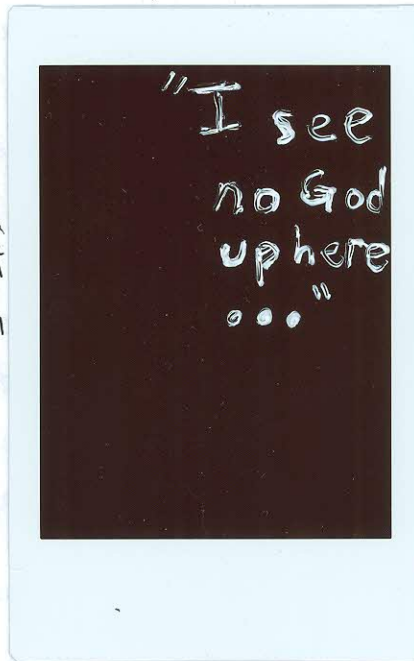
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I searched and searched for Maslow's peak experiences through a camera lens. I found no evidence, and I certainly didn't achieve a peak experience of my own through the pursuit of art. As they say, back to the drawn-theory board. What I found there, was a fear of not knowing.

What I did find, was something like a fear of God. A god is not something explainable by science. A god is not something the religion of science gets to have. Maybe that's why all this unknown is so scary, is because it's outside the religion of science that I was raised in.

this was
meant to
be a
photo of
the church
on 4th and
Irvinson...



... but someone
clearly didn't
want me to
take that
photograph.

*I don't believe in any god; my label reads agnostic.
My label reads lost, too. Label reads
searching. Reads
beyond words.*

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A peak experience—at least within the definition by which I operate and what I search for—cannot be captured. I grew a new fear from wondering: is there something out there keeping me from exposing its ways of working? Words work to hint at the more perfect moments, though whether or not hinting requires the reader to be searching for a peak experience to find one is unclear to me. It's also possible that I loaded the film incorrectly because many of my photos did not turn out at all.

This is a homemade card on a
windowsill with steam rising...



... in front of it, but the
moment was clearly too
beautiful to be captured.

can words suffice where
pictures fail?

Steam rises from a cup of tea.

The tea steeps in a mug wrapped in fauna watercolor

The tea is a perfect green and darkens

each passing of the pine song through its hoop.

Sunlight discovers the space between each

pine needle and passes the whispers of steam

on to my eyes.

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Like sunlight passes on from this room to touch some other mug in some other place, visual representation of Maslow's peak experiences alluded me. Even alongside a happy, happy road to snowy peaks, the ecstasy cannot be captured. Even when I went out with a borrowed polaroid and searched for what was just enough to explain through words what *the peak* feels like, the images evaded me.

*This photo only barely
managed to capture...*



*... the serene contemplative
nature of a used book store.*

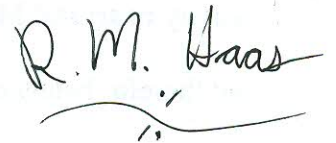
The lesson here

*is that you cannot manufacture the perfect moment,
part of its being perfect comes from its wholly natural spontaneity.*

Hidden Peaks – Searching for Maslow’s Peak Experiences

The real lesson for me here is that art cannot be everything. While everything can be art if it’s looked at with the right eye, not everything in this world can be aptly represented by art. Take my search for Maslow’s peak experiences, for example. While I may very well attempt this hunt again in the future with more experience or a more driving idea, I did not find what I wanted or expected this time around, and I believe there is something just as powerful to be said about that fact. This brings me to question Maslow’s ideas about teaching peak experiences in public schools, or any schools at all. Like finding enlightenment through Buddhism, peak experiences cannot be taught, students can only be shown the beginning of the path thither. The same goes for true creativity, which is why I believe art should be of much higher priority in the standardized modern education. However, peak experiences are not something that can be found through anything that has the word ‘standardized’ associated with it—that is the complete opposite of what true peak experiences are, I believe. To expand on Maslow’s thoughts, (without having read every word he’s ever written on the subject, I will admit) I believe that teaching art is of the utmost importance to a fulfilling modern education, but only for the sake of promoting individual and creative thinking, not in the pursuit of leading every member of society to their own peak experiences. As Maslow’s hierarchy is a pyramid, it has steps, and I am inclined to think that Maslow may have gotten a little excited and jumped too many steps when he was forming his ideas about peak experiences, art education, and his “new Zeitgeist of humanistic psychology” way back in the year 1970. However, whether it’s due to my upbringing based heavily in art and Maslow’s hierarchy or just my personal want for everything to be hierarchical and therefor balanced, I think Maslow was on the right track.

Looking at the strange conglomeration of an artistic project that I have presented in the light of Abraham Maslow's 1970 article on "Peak experiences in education and art," I have a few interesting observations to make on both pieces of work. Maslow discusses how the scientific model is being used incorrectly to study human beings. "The great mistake that we are now learning about is that this model, developed from the study of objects and of things, has been illegitimately used for the study of human beings. It is a terrible technique. It has not worked" (Maslow 3). Being the semi-logical and rather scientifically brained person that I am, I find that it is very probably that I approached this project in a rather scientific manner, which might be one good reason that it turned out so unexpectedly. I read a text, formed a hypothesis of sorts (what was outlined in the project proposal), went out to perform experiments in an attempt to prove my hypothesis, and was unsuccessful. Now, if I were to treat science as my religion and hold fast in my faith therein, I would say that my hypothesis has been proven incorrect and I would continue with the path that the scientific method has laid out for me, and keep trying to visually represent peak experiences in ways that other people can relate to. However, if I learned anything from Maslow's writing, it is that *this will not work*. In many cases (note; not all cases), the scientific method does not gel or work well with peak experiences. This next level of being human is something beyond our current understanding of the workings of the universe—i.e., our currently belief system, i.e., science. I am certainly stretching Maslow's words and ideas to fit my own and to line up with what I have explored previously, but I see no harm in this non-scientific speculation. In fact, I find it highly freeing to ignore process and make something called art from what the scientific method would call failure.



Works Cited

- A. H. Maslow (1971) Peak experiences in education and art, *Theory Into Practice*, 10:3, 149-153, DOI: 10.1080/00405847109542321