Hely Patel
Dr. Higinbotham
English 185
29 October 2019

Nick Sousanis's rhetorical comic book *Unflattening* consists of many significant motifs: the concepts of perception and interpretation of various notions. In his rhetoric, Sousanis defies the conventional ways of writing and conveys his thoughts through limited words and graphic art, ultimately challenging the readers' visual thinking. He discloses that humans tend to adhere to a fixed viewpoint instead of branching out and actually perceiving ideas in diverse ways. This concept can be related to my Dance Improvisation course in which we explore the fundamentals of dance as a method of discovering embodiment and interpret numerous forms of choreography in different ways.

Chapter one of Sousanis's book is titled "Flatness," and he further analyzes this thought throughout the unit (1). He describes flatness as "a great weight descending…suffocating and ossifying, [as] flatness permeates the landscape. Flatness is not literal, no. It cloaks its true nature under a hyper-real façade" (Sousanis 5-6). The idea of flatness heavily relates to the first dance style I learned in my dance improvisation class: fussy. On the first day of classes, my dance professor, Dr. Alejandro Abarca, taught our class that fussy is a type of dance that is typically started on the floor. Dr. Abarca showed this to us by lying flat on his back against the ground. When he demonstrated his fussy, he began by placing himself in a rather still position. Then, as the music started, he gradually moved a limb or two across the floor. For the first few minutes, Professor Abarca highlighted the importance of remaining flat on the ground in a one-dimensional stance. In other words, as Nick Sousanis would assert, "this is a flatness of slight, a contraction of possibilities…where inhabitants conform to what Marcuse called 'a pattern of

one-dimensional thought and behavior'" (6). When I was watching Dr. Abarca perform his fussy,

I noticed that everything in my sight looked "flat" because he was lying horizontally on the

ground. His stance essentially limited him to only a set variety of dance moves. However, after a

couple minutes, Professor Abarca slowly started utilizing different levels. Before, he was in a

rather comfortable position, as he was merely lying on the ground; however, he soon began to

dance around the floor, discovering many new movements and heights, until he was completely

standing on both feet. As a result, fussy is *literally* a prime example of flattening and

unflattening. In his comic book, Sousanis highlights the idea that people tend to conform to a

certain way of thinking and performing, but in reality, they should be seeing the world from

multiple perspectives (8). He continues by writing, "For it starts early, nearly as soon as they can

make tracks of their own…they are sorted out and put on tracks…assigned path and sent forth to

receive instructions" (Sousanis 8). Fussy challenges this generic viewpoint that Sousanis

underscores, because fussy allows individuals to freely attempt dance moves outside of their

comfort zone instead of following a choreographic dance.

        Nick Sousanis also utilizes maps in his graphic novel to establish his thoughts. He

conveys that "when represented through any single mode, the world of our experience, of endless

horizons, is necessarily flattened" (Sousanis 57). Ideally, "information [is] lost" (Sousanis 57).

He strengthens his argument by including a dymaxion map that "projects the globe onto an

icosahedron before unfolding it," which ultimately highlights the idea that "changing orientation

puts forth a decidedly different world view" (Sousanis 57). This suggestion heavily relates to the

map exercise Dr. Abarca introduced to our class. After the first few weeks of classes, Professor

Abarca emphasized that the dance moves and styles that we have been learning since the first

day of classes can be utilized in various ways. He continued by disclosing that instead of simply

performing a fussy or another dance in the middle of the dance floor, we could draw a map that reveals a set pathway, from start to finish, and ultimately follow that pathway. Dr. Abarca then presented this idea on his white board, in which he drew a trail using several lines and shapes to identify what and where he was going to perform. Then, he demonstrated this idea on the dance floor, which instantly changed my point of view. As Sousanis declares, "the closer we look, the more there is to discover" (45). Similarly, although Dr. Abarca was simply presenting the same dance styles we had been learning in class, it was astonishing to watch his performance because I could easily follow each one of his dance moves with the pathway that he drew on the white board. Professor Abarca then made us create our own dance map and exchange it with another student. We then watched our peers perform, as we followed their dance moves through their respective maps. Maps are essentially a powerful tool because they represent a reality to the audience. Even if the audience has not interacted with the area the map covers (in this scenario, that would be me watching Dr. Abarca perform without actually performing myself), people can construct the environment in their mind based on the map and what they see.

Visual imagery is also a dominant theme in Sousanis's book. Because *Unflattening* is a graphic novel, it requires the readers to recognize and interpret the visual imagery that is present. For example, in chapter 3, there are nine rectangles of two-dimensional images that each tell their own story; however, when all nine rectangles are viewed together, it elicits one grand three-dimensional picture (62). Through this image, Sousanis emphasizes that words are just as important as pictures to underscore that individuals are not just limited to purely visual or verbal ideas. When studying the image on page sixty-two, it appears as a visual-verbal dance because all nine pictures are intertwined, which engages the readers and does not constrain them to set modes of thinking and blinking perspectives. Similarly, Dr. Abarca introduced us to a dance

style called "tableau" which is a static scene containing one or more dancers. Tableaus are complex in the sense that they can be expressed and interpreted in various ways. When our class was performing tableaus, the first person walked to the dance floor and placed their hands on their hips. Next, another student entered the scene and performed the same pose as the first person. Then, a third student stood in between the other two and created a gun with their hands, pointing it towards the audience. Essentially these three students were attempting to create a humorous detective movie scene cover with two bodyguards on either side of the police officer. Then, I interjected the sight by sitting in front of the police officer, with my legs crossed and head down. Suddenly, my entrance changed the entire tableau from comedy to tragedy since it instantly portrayed a hostage situation. This example relates to Sousanis's idea that "nothing [changes], except the point of view – which [changes] everything" (33). Although tableaus are not composed of verbal ideas, the visual imagery of them conveys just as strong of a message, if not stronger.

Nick Sousanis's *Unflattening* is simply phenomenal. He explains the importance of widening our worldview and embracing different perspectives: "We can look again from other sides, turn things over and upside down, [since] changing our standpoint reveals unseen aspects that [opens] new possibilities and [expands] our understanding" (Sousanis 43). This ideology is similar to that of my Dance Improvisation class because of the emphasis on fostering creativity and collaboration to connect various concepts and interpret dance moves and styles in different ways. Creative works that encompass visual imagery and symbols, such as dance and *Unflattening* challenge the conventional ways of thinking, enabling individuals to expand their narrow view of the world and universe.

Work Cited

Sousanis, Nick. *Unflattening.* Harvard UP, 2015.

Abarca, Alejandro. "Fussy." Dance Improvisation, 29 Aug. 2019, Oxford College of Emory University, Oxford, GA.

Abarca, Alejandro. "Maps." Dance Improvisation, 12 Sept. 2019, Oxford College of Emory University, Oxford, GA.

Abarca, Alejandro. "Tableau." Dance Improvisation, 1 Oct. 2019, Oxford College of Emory University, Oxford, GA.