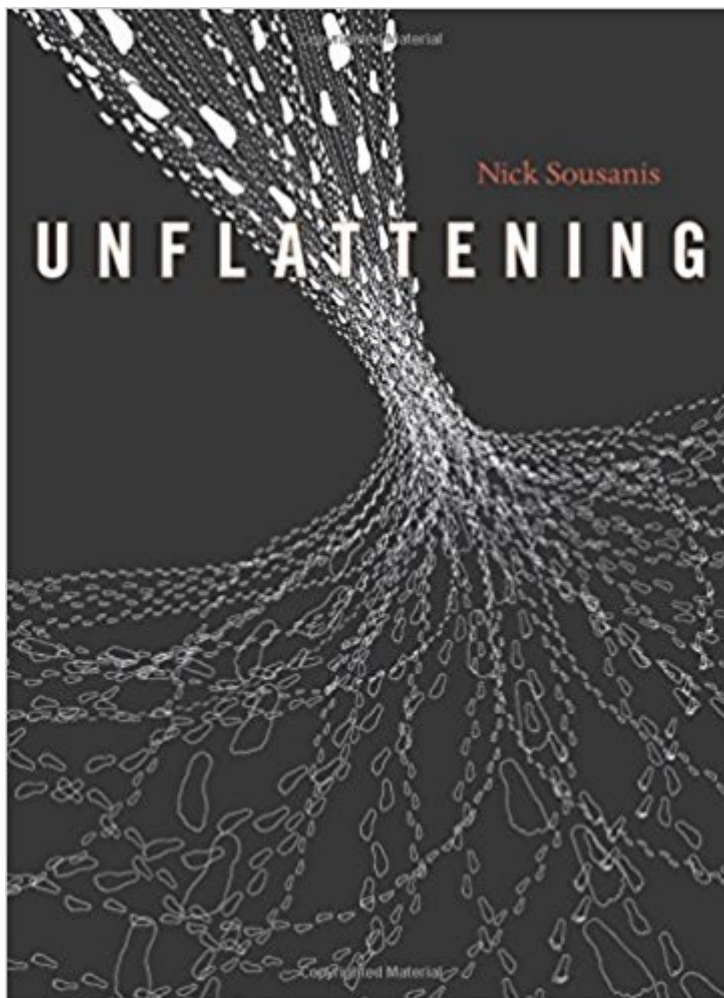


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# Unflattening



## Synopsis

The primacy of words over images has deep roots in Western culture. But what if the two are inextricably linked, equal partners in meaning-making? Written and drawn entirely as comics, *Unflattening* is an experiment in visual thinking. Nick Sousanis defies conventional forms of scholarly discourse to offer readers both a stunning work of graphic art and a serious inquiry into the ways humans construct knowledge. *Unflattening* is an insurrection against the fixed viewpoint. Weaving together diverse ways of seeing drawn from science, philosophy, art, literature, and mythology, it uses the collage-like capacity of comics to show that perception is always an active process of incorporating and reevaluating different vantage points. While its vibrant, constantly morphing images occasionally serve as illustrations of text, they more often connect in nonlinear fashion to other visual references throughout the book. They become allusions, allegories, and motifs, pitting realism against abstraction and making us aware that more meets the eye than is presented on the page. In its graphic innovations and restless shape-shifting, *Unflattening* is meant to counteract the type of narrow, rigid thinking that Sousanis calls “flatness.” Just as the two-dimensional inhabitants of Edwin A. Abbott’s novella *Flatland* could not fathom the concept of “upwards,” Sousanis says, we are often unable to see past the boundaries of our current frame of mind. Fusing words and images to produce new forms of knowledge, *Unflattening* teaches us how to access modes of understanding beyond what we normally apprehend.

## Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (April 20, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674744438

ISBN-13: 978-0674744431

Product Dimensions: 7.5 x 1 x 10.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 60 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #10,528 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #20 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Biographies & History Graphic Novels #23 in Books > Education & Teaching > Schools & Teaching > Education Theory > Philosophy & Social Aspects #50 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Cognitive

## Customer Reviews

Ranging across a wide range of disciplines—the arts, the sciences, popular culture, critical theory—Sousanis argues that the verbal and the visual are inextricably entwined in the production of knowledge. It is a book that is dense with the syntheses of ideas, nimble, far-reaching and impossible to summarize. It liberates itself from the standard layout of panels within frames, teaching the eye and mind to read the unfailingly intelligent black-and-white artwork in unconventional and new ways. Unflattening deserves a place as a compulsory textbook in schools. (Neel Mukherjee New Statesman 2015-10-02) Although the implications are profound, Unflattening is less an insurrection than a carefully argued case for rethinking our priorities about art and learning. Unflattening is above all a humane piece of scholarship which challenges our assumptions about perception. (Matt Finch Brooklyn Rail 2015-05-06) If you prefer your mind-melt, dimension-bending comics with less costumes and melodrama, Nick Sousanis's cerebral exploration of psychology and perspective offers a refreshing palate cleanser. Presented with a visual vocabulary that will blow readers' minds in the most scholarly way possible. (Sean Edgar Paste 2015-07-08) Sousanis's drawings are first rate and his writing style economical. To demonstrate how introducing new vantage points expands our thinking, he explores a range of philosophical concepts, calling on Plato, Copernicus, and even the fifth dimension explored in the TV series The Twilight Zone. (Jan Gardner Boston Globe 2015-05-24) Nick Sousanis's Unflattening is a genuine oddity, a philosophical treatise in comics form. Flatness, for Sousanis's purposes, is not the quality of abstraction that Clement Greenberg lauded in modern art, but the lamentable condition of the inhabitants of Edwin A. Abbott's Flatland: the inability to understand that there might be more than one can immediately perceive. The solution he proposes is admitting visual elements, and especially drawings, into the intellectual domain of language. (Psst—the author's talking about comics!) (Douglas Wolk New York Times Book Review 2015-05-29) If Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics charmingly investigated the history, development, and formal features of visual narrative, Unflattening is its equally brilliant epistemological counterpart. With profound depth and insight, Sousanis looks at how the unflattening possibilities of this form of storytelling allow us to see the world from entirely new perspectives. Written with remarkable clarity and insight, its sometimes-haunting, sometimes-breathtaking illustrations prove the book's arguments about how visual information can shape our understanding. Weaving together language, perception, and the theory of knowledge in an investigation of how the multidimensional possibilities

of graphic storytelling can awaken us to ways of knowing from multiple perspectives, Sousanis has made a profound contribution to the field of comics studies and to semiotics, epistemology, and the burgeoning study of visible thinking. Essential reading for anyone seeking to create, critique, or consider the visual narrative form. (Publishers Weekly (starred review) 2015-03-16)An important book, Unflattening is consistently innovative, using abstraction alongside realism, using framing and the (dis)organization of the page to represent different modes of thought. The words and images speak for themselves and succeed on their own terms. I couldn't stop reading it. (Henry Jenkins, author of Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Society)Nick Sousanis's Unflattening is a complex, beautiful, delirious meditation on just about everything under the sun; a unique and bracing read. (Scott McCloud, author of Understanding Comics and Making Comics)An incisive meditation on the relationship between text and images. (David Dabscheck New York Observer 2015-10-29)Entirely non-narrative, the book takes on the dichotomy between words and images in Western thought and argues that both are simultaneously involved in the production of meaning. Executed in sharp black-and-white diagrams, and abstract and geometric images, this scintillatingly intelligent book succeeds in the great feat of holding the reader's attention not through a story but through ideas. Sousanis's own book is the perfect illustration of the inextricability of the verbal and the visual. (Neel Mukherjee The Independent 2015-11-28)Unflattening will no doubt become an essential teaching tool for helping students especially undergraduates think about comics, graphic novels, and other media in which words and images combine. The book is potentially revolutionary. This is a book that wants to teach, a book that will be talked about and belongs in any forward-looking library. (R. J. Baumann Choice 2015-10-01)[This] will alter your perceptions, of comics, of art, of how to see and process your world and your ideas. Sousanis is relentlessly innovative in his solutions to picturing his concepts and in the process provides irrefutable proof of the efficacy of the medium to explain engagingly and memorably. It also uses two dimensional words and images to encourage us to broaden our horizons and deepen our understanding, in other words to perceive in multiple dimensions. And yes, reading comics re-wires your mind. (Paul Gravett paulgravett.com 2016-01-01)Unflattening is Nick Sousanis's meditation on the nature of learning and visual communication. At a time when graphic literature has become widely accepted as a medium for fiction and memoir, Unflattening breaks new ground in the use of visual narrative for the expression of abstract ideas. Beautifully drawn and brilliantly conceived, Unflattening is an instant classic. (Rob Salkowitz Forbes 2015-12-21)Sousanis's investigation into the connection between word and image could not

have been presented in any other way. [He] presents a philosophical and reference heavy treatise in a compelling and accessible manner. (Don O'Mahony Irish Examiner 2015-12-30) Frankly, genius. (Zachary Petit Print 2015-12-07) Sousanis has achieved something powerful. It's a book that goes beyond just saying a thesis to actually showing one. (Stephen Asma Los Angeles Review of Books 2016-05-06) There is much in Unflattening that will interest and stimulate thought for higher education scholars, teachers and students. In this beautiful and complex book, Sousanis grapples with core tenets of Western knowledge: who are our heroes, and why do we valorize their charts and grids so much more than, for example, the oral traditions of Pacific navigators who could read the stars? It is a beautiful book and a complex book that defies categorization. That's why I recommend it. (Frances Kelly Higher Education Research & Development 2017-02-01)

Nick Sousanis is Assistant Professor of Humanities and Liberal Studies at San Francisco State University.

This is one of the few academic thesis to be accepted as a graphic which makes it worthy of serious consideration not only for the work itself but the challenge that it offers for a rather prosaic and conservative process for recognizing scholarship. The drawings are dense and one wonders whether the publisher understands book art (not art books) in its choice of how to publish the material or whether there will be an edition produced more in line with book art publishing. 5 stars for the author tempered by the choice of how to publish this work.

Unflattening is a breakthrough work, taking the art of comics and elevating it to new heights. Sousanis integrates a range of different fields, from history and philosophy, to physics and social psychology, to address new and important ways of thinking about thinking. At the center of it all is an advocacy for drawing as a form of cognition vital to honing our twenty-first century literacies. This is a masterwork. If I could afford it, I would give a copy to everyone I know. (And I've already dispensed several.) Buy this book. You will find yourself reading it again and again.

A thoughtful, beautiful and lucid book about the limits of human consciousness and strategies for transcending them. Outstanding and visually rich. Strongly recommended.

While Sousanis focused on the graphic medium, his explanation of looking at anything from a

broader perspective helps all of us to see our world and lives more clearly.

4.5 stars, but 5 for the effort. The ideas are not altogether new or unfamiliar; if you know McCloud's Understanding Comics, or have read Lakoff and Johnson's Metaphors We Live By, you're used to this kind of reframing the world. But it's a lovely work, nevertheless, and many of the pages do demand fresh reading approaches.

I didn't realize until I received this book that it is actually in the form of a graphic novel! Every page is full of really beautiful, detailed black-and-white illustrations. The language and concepts can get a bit heavy at points, but the images make it an entertaining read nonetheless.

Thought provoking, although a quicker read than I expected. If you're familiar with Scott McCloud's work, some image sequences will be familiar, but Sousanis brings together philosophy, reading theory, and graphic novel/comic book theory (for lack of a better term) in an interesting way. The field is still feeling its way around the words that best describe a medium which goes beyond and includes them, and this is a compelling contribution.

Good book

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Unflattening

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