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ENG 185

Date

Be Who You Want to Be

Acting forces people to take on different personas and learn how to express themselves in unique ways. These talented individuals must learn to tailor their voices and facial expressions for varying scripts and plays. In celebrating originality, the art leaves no room for conformity. Exercises commonly practiced in theater are eccentric, forcing people to sometimes moan. I have learned to appreciate the craziness of the art through a college-level acting course. Now, imagine a world where everyone looks the same and does the same actions— that is flattening.

Unflattening, however, allows individuals to embrace the uniqueness of who they are and what they aspire to be. In his book *Unflattening*, Nick Sousanis shares these two approaches to how people can live. Acting inspires individuality, thus preventing the conformity that comes with flattening. Unflattening and acting share similar principles like imagination, encouragement of partner work, and pushing people to leave their comfort zones, thus acting would amplify a universal unflattening.

The various acting methodologies and characters challenge actors to take on new personas, preventing them from thinking similarly. Acting relies on the ability for people to have fun as characters opposing flattening's fixed viewpoint, where everyone appears the same. Defying flattened people's "pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior," (6) actors believe in eight dissimilar types of behavior, such as the Ring, Press, Flick, Dab, Glide, Float, Punch, and Slash (Sousanis 6; Owens). While each might sound ridiculous, the varying actions utilize

weight, motion, and energy to activate the performance. I have begun to understand why each action is critical, even after much frustration, as they differentiate actors' behaviors and movements. Now, picture a performance where an actor predetermined their motions and tones without interacting with the audience— that would be disengaging and dry. It is clear that none of an actor's "choices (of which there are seemingly many) are predefined" as they must cater their performances to connect with their audience and help people associate feelings of joy with art (7). Additionally, improv performances are exemplary instances as improvisers must collaborate with their audience to perform on the spot, preventing their ability to practice ahead of time. Performers cannot focus on the same themes and ideas based on the nature of their work, where plays range from *Little Mermaid* to *Hamilton*. Due to the distinctiveness of plays' tones and actors' talents, differing interpretations of the same scripts would push for the unflattening of society.

Theaters' reliance on creativity for strong characterization in performance supports Sousanis's claim that imagination is crucial for humans to think separately. After Sousanis spends a significant portion explaining how people have become similar, he reminds readers that "[t]here is imagination" (88). One famous exercise employing this innovation forces people to behave like a specific object, such as a toaster or television (Owens). People must act spontaneously and depend on their creativity to appear as inanimate objects with distinct sounds and movements. Acting and Sousanis both serve as reminders for people to utilize their imaginations.

My professor regularly states that performers must "embrace the imagination of their inner child," thus proving acting's use of innovation (Owens). In my theater class, I have relearned to use my imagination after losing it to the standardization of college preparation work

and AP studies. By pushing people to take on roles contrasting their genuine personalities, acting can help individuals break out of normative behaviors and embrace the unexpected.

Acting reflects the book's encouragement for people to leave their comfort zones and reevaluate their thinking patterns. Sousanis reminds readers they can “step out” and should not follow actions or standards not fit for them (25). Oftentimes, playwrights create roles that force actors to think outside the box, leaving no room for conformity. Even if it only means walking funny, unflattering serves as a vehicle reminding people to try actions that defy normativity. When an actor aspires to fulfill a writer's unrealistic expectations, they often produce a poor product and prove Sousanis’s claim that “conforming to another expectations is detrimental” (146). A plethora of exercises, like when people must pretend they are animals, help them find innovative ways to express themselves and advocate who they are as a performer. Sousanis even supports the art's central themes by saying, “We must sing, dance, seek ways to step out” (113), all of which people do in a play. By discouraging people from conforming and promoting the celebration of experimentation, unflattering and acting encouraged going outside the comfort zone.

Though the books push for people to think differently and meet other individual's energy, actors remember the importance of partner work. When performers feel frustrated with their partner or the inability to produce a strong product, they might read the book to remember the importance of group work. Sousanis claim that “Dueling parties become collaborative partners” supports an exercise where two people must look each other in the eyes and attempt to move synchronously. The claim also reminds frustrated individuals that they will eventually collaborate successfully (38). Partner work requires both parties to see “through another's eyes- from where they stand and attend... to what they attend to” (39). An engaging performance is

cohesive and one where partners respond to each other appropriately since differentiating tasks cause confusion. Sousanis reminds actors to be aware of their surroundings and identify actions their peers will take next. To formulate a cohesive product, the book and theater both believe that people must work together and use others' energies.

Sousanis reminds readers that people need art to unflatten, and acting is a critical part of art. Unflattening reflects many of an actor's basic principles such as trying new actions, using the imagination, and collaborating with others. The themes of unflattening, therefore, serve as a reminder for actors to understand the importance of their work. Sometimes the field can be challenging due to short term jobs and long hours, so performers need reminders of why their work is critical to a vibrant society. The book illustrates an unflattened world as boring without culture and emotion. What is one way to fix dryness: actors. Actors piece together individual personas creating robust and engaging performances that enrich others. Acting is always different and helps people engage in media in ways that prevent uniformity. Through its costume, set, and design, acting forces people to look at plays via different lenses and prevents people from interpreting performance the same.

Work Cited

Owens, Mary Lynn, "Effort Shapes." Introduction to Acting, 10 Sep. 2023, Oxford College, Class Lecture.

Sousanis, Nick. *Unflattening*. Harvard University Press, 2015.