Denise Fanning's Detroit Installation

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The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.

Dr. Nick Sousanis credited Denise Whitebread Fanning's unique Detroit Installation as having a significant impact on his own work, Unflattening. Fanning is an artist who lives in central Michigan and whose works have been shown in exhibitions in Detroit, Philadelphia, and Berlin as well as other cities. In her installation entitled, What Should We Do, installed in the Tagent Gallery in Detroit, Michigan, one can easily see the connection between her hauntingly stony figures molded out of papier-mâché and the identically drawn figures prominent in Sousanis' Unflattening. Their blank stares and uniformity show that in both the world of Denise Fanning's Detroit installation and Dr. Sousanis' Unflattening, these human beings are all stuck in a situation that they do not like, but do not know how to find their way out of.

In What Should We Do Fanning looks to call mankind's attention to our social responsibility by having her figures standing around a plot of grass while watching mechanized birds fly around until their batteries slowly die and they drop to the ground. As the destruction happens, the figures stand by unsure what to do. Their stony features perturbed yet confused, echo many people's confusion over the different and difficult social problems being faced in our world today.

Sousanis, on the other hand, uses his figures to show the "flatness" and standardization of the individuals that are being put into "boxes;" the boxes of norms and the ordinary. The figures stand by unable to do anything as each new human being is boxed in to the expectations of the "ordinary." Thus, everyone in their world has no uniqueness, no personality, no way of leaving their own mark on the world that they live in.

While Sousanis writes as a recent graduate student, Denise Fanning creates her art as a mother of two and the wife of a poet. These influences have not failed to leave an impact on her work. In an interview with Jennifer Vande Zande, she said, "I am quite consumed by my role as mother."

Fanning's installations have worked to raise awareness of different issues—all of which could impact her family—such as the impact on the environment shown in What Should We Do. In fact, one could argue that Fanning's installation What Should We Do may have been the very question that jump started Unflattening; the immense question asked by every person on the planet in the face of various
difficulties. In Sousanis' *Unflattening*, one finds his answer to that immense question, "What should we do?"

What should we do in the face of an increasing standardization of human personalities, abilities, and talents? What happens when a student who learns differently than another enter the system? Should he be subjected to the same techniques and theories? What should we do? What should we do?

"Well," says Nick Sousanis, "Unflatten."

For Further Reading

[Denise Whitehead Fanning's Website](http://scholarlyvoices.org/unflattening/definitions/fanning.html)