Where Great Ideas Come From

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This mini-lesson would take 30-45 minutes to present or it can be assigned as homework. If the lesson concludes with the "Where Good Ideas Come From" video, an addition 5-20 minutes is needed depending on which version of the video is screened.

In his notes to Unflattening (p. 157-159), Nick Sousanis mentions some of his influences for creating the images in chapter 1. Assign one of the influences to each student or team of students for them to research. Their findings can then be presented and discussed in class.

As part of the discussion, I focus on socio-cultural influences because that is a theme/terminology that I incorporate into my courses.

When I first did this lesson, I took students to the library to use the computers there. Using the library allowed students to print out their research in order to incorporate it into essays I wanted them to write. However, the lesson could easily be done using the students' smart phones without leaving the classroom. It could also be assigned as a homework. Students can be asked to draft a reaction/reflection paper concerning their research.

The influences that Sousanis mentions include:

- Piranesi's Carceri
- Fritz Lang's Metropolis
- Anton Furst's designs for Gotham City
- Borg from Star Trek
- Denise Fanning's Detroit Installation
- Munch's Scream
- Kathe Kollwitz's anguished figures
- Giacometti's figures
- Death from The Seventh Seal
- Rabindranath Tagore's education factory
- John Dewey
- Cathy N. Davidson's description of students

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Photo Credit: Student consulting "Notes" in Unflattening while researching one of Nick Sousanis' influences.
As part of this lesson, I screen Steven Johnson’s "Where Good Ideas Come From" [18:16]. This talk emphasizes that great ideas do not come as eureka moments; but are a result of building on collaboration and influences. An abridged version of this talk [4:06] is also available.

I asked all students to do research on Dr. Davidson’s description of students because the information cannot be found on the Internet. Students are able to find information about Davidson and Now You See It (2011), but they cannot find this specific information. As part of the discussion, I make the point that not everything can be found on-line.

Videos

“Where Good Ideas Come From”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0af00UcTO-c

“Where Good Ideas Come From” (abridged)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mb0ssmoXG1l