

## Synaesthesia

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**Synaesthesia: to experience a sense in the modality of one or several others**

### Abstract

The following entry includes firstly a list of synaesthetic portals, and secondly an initial table of scaled sensory modalities following Felicity Colman's 'Fragment of a Modalities Map' (Colman, 2019, p. 985-987). James Joyce famously begins his 'Proteus' chapter of *Ulysses* with Stephen Dedalus describing the 'ineluctable modality of the visible' (Joyce, 1922, p. 37). Synaesthesia presents a phenomenon whereby the modality is not merely ineluctable but is also a portal that can potentially link one sensory realm to another, suggesting an infrastructural connectivity that links ostensibly individuated or hermetically differentiated perceptual fields. To describe this process as merely the condition of synaptic short-circuitry affecting a small percentage of human animals does not account for the ways in which synaesthesia is always already at play in all the regular sensory categories, in its experience as and between what analytic philosophers call 'qualia', neither does it account for also the ways it can be played as if it were an instrument itself. Perception in general can be perceived as an organ within itself: a desiring organ, as Vicki Kirby says in *Quantum Anthropologies* (2011, p. 120).

### Keywords

Sense; sensory; modality; perception; organ

## Synaesthetic Portals

If we continue to think of perception as a desiring organ, then, how would it desire? Let me count (some of) the ways.

**optical-auditory** the sound of dust falling in the light. It falls in streams as if a prism is resting there and all along the banks a hymn is sounding. The tone of a summer afternoon is between clarinet and oboe. How else? The honeyed yellow haze, afternoon of the faun, the slumber and the dream of prancing legs and love amongst grass and flower. To scale and balance with seasons and times we could. The cloudless night: the light bare and headache glare of snow on pine-flanked frosted path. Whose woods these are. The crunch of boots in whiteness and the swirl of purple and red. Bruised hearts between the ears. How can headphones make this. The heart is bruised, the pitch-bend moves. Narcotic bloodletting sickness under the pale moon. My bloody valentine.

**optical-olfactory** when a scent is the scent of a scent. The absolute blooming of a bloom. The reddest of reds. Tied tight and deep in the colour. Never is this knot seen, a knot in the word and look what bursts forth. A haze, within which to be suffused, as when a scent is diffused. A rose by any other shape would smell as sweet and ripen then transform. Diamond petals fall like rain to form a sea of diamond waves. Bravely sails the folded paper-  
napkin boat upon this scented sea.

**optical-tactile** all sensitive hairs touch with their eyes: tendrils, tentacles, antennae, each bristle of the brush. Periscopes in love are twisting beams or vines of light with eyes on strings that stretch and tend towards the thing they love. When they meet they twist and thread together making bracelets to twist around the arms of those who love, lovers as those who also see with fingers, then fingers too have eyes that stretch and tend towards the thing they love, and so, and so, ad infinitum. Triadic structures twist and plait to form a golden braid that tumbles from the highest window of the tower. Towers, too, of course, have eyes. Panhapticon.

**optical-gustatory** when it is about to thunder – a bruise across the sky but also lead pipes lying against the roof of the mouth. The anticipation of a shock is felt as metal. A translucent

taste has only silent notes and overlays, harmonic flavours, lilac with sawdust, geranium with mildew. The way the light catches the green bottle makes five layers of overtones: fresh/mystery/race/wail/lawn.

**auditory-gustatory** echoes and shadows of tastes and scents. To move from state to taste, it's there in the mastication of the matter. Time slows down when honey is hardened and holding grains together. Nothing is heard outside the crunch inside the internal cavern. Not a correlate of density. The lightest note carried on a phantom wind is stronger than the saturated slab that thuds the ground.

**auditory-tactile** rough splintered sticks stuck in sludgy soupy mire or honey. The grain of the voice that grates, a voice only sounds when it goes against the grain of itself. These rusty shards to penetrate, little knives and needles, offcuts, shards of a spectrum. A splinter is what you feel, not of wood but of glass. The sound of roughness can be scaled and the units are extremely small. A composite sound with fibres inside, rough to touch but very strong. Polish up, add lacquer to make this surface all one silent glide. The pores are singing.

**auditory-olfactory** If we call a rose a rose, in the smound we are called by its note. Redness in the nose. Scales upon them and nostrils encrusted with jewels. Reeded holes that whistle when the air blows through. But inside the nostrils' double tunnels a symphony is playing. Add a drop of liquid, a tack in the aperture, the hole winks open and closed, wetly. Clicks that do not express but do betray a moisture. Listen, the pipes need cleaning. The smell is not separated from the honey of its lining: these chambers are wooden, streaked with amber. Blow your nose: a sepia note.

**tactile-olfactory** and if it were resting there, transcendent, what then? The cool hard edges lend themselves to forbidden scents of glass and metal. Scents that should not be there and for which we have no name. It omits what you permit it. So permit it. Put your nostrils close and out will puff a cloud, a scent of violet disturbs the senses, the object wants to make you love it. The cloud is a bloom as when algae becomes exponential. The tendrils of the creature logarithmically recoil just as the diminishing return of the spiralled dome in which it rests. The sheen of slime that hides the scent before it hardens to varnish.

**olfactory-gustatory** conjoined and sharing a brain. The wires are already crossed. A bite is always a more than a double articulation. The morsel is felt in all the chambers, but most elegantly in the brain. And what of this spongelike matter, grey and white jelly mulch, tough to chew but rewardingly metallic. Your stem is a delicate bird with a long straight tail such as that of a swallow. To taste the same genus as yourself is still a nourishing tautology.

**tactile-gustatory** when tongues are tendrils and tendrils are tongues. Licked by a jellyfish, one thousand lashes. The papillae are stinging. When faint tide mark of sea salt powdering the post-paddled lower human limb attracts the pink and spiny wriggling slice that lies inside the mouth of the cat. A fizzing magic potion of citric acid and sodium bicarbonate and saliva, mix and swirl to white fizzing lava through the rolling hills and grasses of the human tongue. Blistering lemon sherbet moon craters.

Table 1: Sensory Modalities

Sensory system	Organ	Symbol(s)	Greco / Roman word	Deities / mythological figures	Poetic or religious connotations	Philosophers / writers	Scales / spectra / unit quanta
Visual / Optic	Eye, pineal gland	Eye of Horus / Irt Oudjat Ojo de Dios Eye of Providence The Evil Eye Nazar Boncuk Third Eye / Jnana Chaksus	μάτι, oculus	Dogu, St. Lucy / Lucifer	Window to the soul, symbolic or inner visión, intuition, third eye / brow chakra	René Descartes, Democritus	Visual field, light, chromatic spectrum, vibrations
Auditory / Aural	Ear	Whorl / spiral, <i>shankha</i>	αυτί, auris	Kama, Santo Ovídio	Shell, vulva, fertility, inquisitiveness, memory, theosophy, the sun	H.P. Blavatsky, Gerard Manley Hopkins	Frequency, amplitude, scales, vibrations
Olfactory	Nose, olfactory bulb, Jacobson's Organ	Discernment / discretion, phallus	μύτη, nasus	Yacatecuhtli	Saint Anthony of Padua, detection of hazard or falsity, caricature	Salman Rushdie, Nikolai Gogol, Lyall Watson	Inelastic electron tunnelling / vibrational theory of olfaction, scent molecules
Gustatory	Tongue	Phallus, serpent, language	ιλῶσσα, lingua	Kali	Mémoire involontaire, glossolalia, divine language, restraining the tongue in Ramadan	Thomas Tomkis, Marcel Proust	Food molecules, papillae, olfactory system

Tactile / Haptic	Skin, interstitium	Boundary, identity, communication, feeling	δέρμα, pellis	Xipe Totec	Mark/tattoos/signs of possession/holiness; reptilian shedding of skin, Job's wounds	Democritus Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Didier Anzieu, Steven Connor	Surface-skin mehanoreceptors, wavelengths
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