

## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 36

*ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c'est que le son ne pût pas suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs ne pussent pas donner l'idée d'une mélodie, et que le son et la couleur fussent impropres à traduire des idées ; les choses s'étant toujours exprimées par une analogie réciproque, depuis le jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et indivisible totalité.*

Charles Baudelaire<sup>1</sup>

Synaesthesia is a recognized neurological phenomenon in which the sensory impressions associated with one sense are produced by the stimulation of another. In other terms, in those who have this faculty, sensory experiences are not connected uniquely to one, but to two or more senses. Some experience odours as sounds, others graphemes as colours, still others music as tastes, for example. Though some types of synaesthesia are more common than others, there seem to be endless possibilities for combinations of sensory experiences, and scientific research into these phenomena has just begun to uncover their complexities. Since certain artists, musicians and writers, Kandinsky, Scriabin and Nabokov for example, were acknowledged synaesthetes, we were led to wonder how the creative urge is linked to this special faculty. We made it the leading theme of the International Word and Image Conference convened at the Université de Bourgogne in June 2014. The idea was not to examine the scientific basis of synaesthesia, but rather to ask how such interrelated sensory experiences are translated into images and writing, how successful synaesthetes are in describing their experiences, and whether non-synaesthetes can share these perceptions indirectly through their representations in images and texts. In other words, the aim of the conference was to examine the representation of perceptions that fall outside the established categories of distinct sense impressions. Pursuing the issues

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<sup>1</sup> “What would be truly surprising would be that sound could not suggest colour, that colours could not evoke the idea of a melody, and that sound and colour were unsuitable for the translation of ideas, seeing that things have always found their expression through a system of reciprocal analogy, since the day God uttered the world as a complex and indivisible unity.” Charles Baudelaire, *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris*, 1861 ; publié dans *L'Art Romantique*, Michel Lévy Frère, 1868, in *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, Gallimard, La Pléiade, tome 2, 1976, p. 784.

raised by Hervé-Pierre Lambert in his article “La synesthésie. Vues de l’intérieur”,<sup>2</sup> the emphasis fell on the communication of synaesthetic experiences to non-synaesthetes and the extent to which texts and images are able to convey non-visual sensations. As works of art, whether literary or visual, often play on the connections between the different senses, and as artists, knowingly or unknowingly, make use of the faculty of the brain to bring together different sense perceptions, the conference included talks centering on poetic metaphors involving different senses and papers focusing on intermediality, as networks of different media also imply relations between different senses.

Although the scientific dimension of synaesthesia was not the prime focus of the conference, it was important to consider the way it shapes current research in intermedial studies. Two scientific specialists were thus invited as keynote speakers: Noam Sagiv, lecturer in psychology at Brunel University London, whose research interests include synaesthesia and cross-modal interactions, neural correlates of consciousness and face perception, and Catherine Dacremont, professor at AgroSup Dijon and the Centre des Sciences du Goût et de l’Alimentation de l’Université de Bourgogne, whose research interests lie in food science in relation with experimental and cognitive psychology. Noam Sagiv’s keynote conference was on synaesthesia and its relationship to consciousness, the self, and the body. Western science has found it desirable to isolate the senses in order to study them, whereas our perceptions are always multisensory. If synaesthesia can be innate or acquired, it has, in order to be considered as such, to be involuntary, consistent and specific. The study of synaesthesia gives us insights into brain mechanisms, but also into social interaction, and opens onto the real issue of intersubjective representations. We are cut off from the inner world of others, though we keep trying to bridge the gaps, through words and representations. Catherine Dacremont’s keynote conference focused on cross-modal associations in the appreciation of flavours, and so she was able to give us an example of how perceptions and representations, in her specific domain, that of food acceptability, appreciation and tasting, are biased not only by food characteristics, but by age, culture, psychology. We generally distinguish a limited number of flavours, but we seem to be able to recognize an unlimited number of odours. These two sensory systems overlap when we eat, and our sense of sight also interferes in our appreciation of food, as we make assumptions about the connection colours/tastes. A visit of the Centre des Sciences du Goût et de l’Alimentation and a blind test organized immediately after Catherine Dacremont’s talk allowed the participants to the conference to have a first-hand experience of how tricky and intricate senses are even outside a synaesthetic configuration.

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<sup>2</sup> Hervé-Pierre Lambert, *Epistémocritique*, Vol. 8, printemps 2011, ISSN 1913-536X.

It also seemed important to associate synaesthetes to the project in the person of Gabrielle Thierry, a French painter who perceives music as landscape and translates her perception visually on canvas. Over the years Thierry has developed an elaborate pictorial vocabulary to represent musical compositions in paintings. Her pictorial interpretation of musical composition is as spontaneous as possible and relies on cognitive mechanisms that create their own logic of a visual language. Her recent works include “Musical



Qualities of the Water Lilies” inspired by Claude Monet’s masterpieces (2010-2012), “Musical Sentences” (2012-2013) and “Variations: Music and Landscape” (2013-2015) based on sonatas, concertos or suites by J.S. Bach, Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt, Mozart or Anton Bruckner. At the conference Gabrielle Thierry presented a series of oil and watercolour paintings inspired by Ravel’s “La Valse” written in 1919-1920. The art offering in this issue is an original watercolour piece by this Parisian artist: “Improvisations” visualizes Ravel’s music in a space of forms and colors, notes with their sound waves being visually translated into overlapping chromatic circles in light blue, brown and orange.

We were pleased to be authorized to use the work of Haydn Comner (“Table for One”, 1994) as a poster for the conference. Chosen originally by Richard E. Cytowic for the front cover of *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), this joyful, cheerful and vivid representation of synaesthesia, involving music, vision and taste, perfectly reflected our own perspective on the question and was meant as a *clin d’oeil* to one of the leading contributors to contemporary studies on synaesthesia.

This new issue of *Interfaces* comprises a selection of papers presented at the conference. They are organized in two sections: essays in the first section focus more specifically on synaesthesia



Abstract Photographs,” Kristen Adlhoch explores the abstract photography of American-born artist Francis Bruguière. Martinelli tracks synaesthesia in *Mystika čichu* (*The Mystic of Smell*), a richly illuminated book published in 1920 that resembles William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* or *Songs of Experience* in its size and artistry. Comparing this artist’s book to a herbarium, Martinelli shows how synaesthesia materializes in the multifarious readings offered by the proximity between texts and images. In her paper, Adlhoch argues that abstract photographs in the early-twentieth century frequently relied heavily on senses other than sight in their creation and reception, which triggered multi-sensory and emotional responses in their viewers.

in relation to art images (paintings, photographs, prints, illustrations, etc.). The second section comprises articles on poetry and the translation of synaesthesia into verbal images.

In her essay, “More Than a Condition: An Examination of *Synaesthesia* as a Key Cognitive Factor in the Processing of Reality and in its Literary and Pictorial Renditions”, **Séverine Letalleur-Sommer** explores the hypothesis according to which synaesthesia might be a way of perceptually securing data that is too elusive or abstract to be easily recorded in the memory and therefore understood. She shows that synaesthetic phenomena openly challenge linguistic arbitrariness and give a new lease of life to semiotic conventions that combine various sensorial modalities.

**Hélène Martinelli** and **Kristen Adlhoch** present the works of two visual artists. In her study, “Graver, peindre, écrire l’odeur: la mystique de l’odorat de Josef Vachal”, Hélène Martinelli presents the work of Josef Vachal, a Czech writer, painter, printmaker and book-printer, while in her essay, “The Synaesthetic Experience of Light: Francis Bruguière’s

In her essay dedicated to Ivor Armstrong Richards's *Foundations of Aesthetics* co-authored with Charles K. Ogden and the painter James Wood, **Bénédicte Coste** discusses Richards's definition and use of synaesthesia. In "De la synesthésie : *The Foundations of Aesthetics*" (1922), she demonstrates how synaesthesia is part of a reevaluation of aesthetic categories in Richards's analysis, particularly with respect to the definition of beauty. Coste also explains Richards's invitation to the reader to experience synaesthesia through a careful selection of works of art. She emphasizes that images are not mere "illustrations" in his short treatise and argues that, on the contrary, images and texts function as stimuli for the type of aesthetic education that Richards felt was indispensable for "general readers." Pitting texts against images derails any normative manner of reading a theoretical text and functions as a powerful means of enacting theory.

**Marie Bouchet** explores the links between synaesthesia and metaphor in iconotexts used by Nabokov to structure erotic scenes in his novels (*Lolita*, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, *Invitation of a Beulah*). In an essay entitled "'Sounds have colors, colors have smells' (*Ada* 336) : synesthésie et métaphore dans les textes poétiques nabokoviens," she analyzes how the tumult of senses and the pleasure of language are enhanced and translated by synaesthesia. Emphasizing with Cytowic and Eagleman that "the difference between the synesthetic and nonsynesthetic brain [...] is not *whether* there is cross talk, but rather *how much* cross talk there is," Bouchet also explores the perception of Nabokov's synaesthesia by readers, especially when non-synaesthetists themselves.<sup>3</sup> In her essay on Joris-Karl Huysmans's art criticism, "L'optique et l'haptique dans la critique d'art de Joris-Karl Huysmans," **Aude Jeannerot** explains how the pleasure of successful artistic illusion is attained through a shift from aesthetics to *aesthesis*—that is, when the viewer perceives the piece of artwork not only optically but haptically through the haptic function of his gaze. This in turn allows him to "touch" the work with his eyes. An essay by **Brigitte Friant-Kessler** entitled "Synaesthetics Within and Beyond Laurence Sterne's Fiction" explores synaesthetic effects in Laurence Sterne's two novels *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). The comparative approach at work in Friant-Kessler's discussion provides a close examination of illustration and narrative with respect to the manner in which the development of characterization is tied to the unfolding of sensory experience.

The second part of the volume is dedicated to poetic explorations and transcriptions of synaesthesia. Taking Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue, Corbières ou Mallarmé as examples, **Sandra**

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<sup>3</sup> Richard E. Cytowic & David M. Eagleman, *Wednesday is Indigo Blue: Discovering the Brain of Synesthesia*, Boston: MIT Press, 2009, p. 205.

**Glatigny** in “Émotions synesthésiques et lyrisme transgénérique” first shows that synaesthesia contributed to the renewal of lyricism in the French poetry of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She emphasizes that multisensory writing characteristic of synaesthetic lyricism exceeds traditional generic and artistic classifications and transforms the relations between writer and reader, reality and representation. The lasting influence of Arthur Rimbaud’s poetry through its melding of the senses and a visionary poetics underpins **Michel Arouimi**’s discussion of explorations of the symbolic and thematic modalities of synaesthetic experience among a selection of twentieth-century writers: “Des textes à toucher du doigt : Rimbaud, Claudel, Ramuz, Carlo Levi.” **Fabien Desset** investigates synaesthesia in connection with ekphrasis in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poetry. In his essay entitled, “Synesthesia in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Ekphrasis: From Audible Paintings to Tangible Ideas,” Desset analyzes the extent to which synaesthesia compensates for the shortcomings of language in dealing with other media, paint or marble. He also discusses whether ekphrasis can be described as synaesthetic and how this contributes to regenerate figurative language or what he calls “relations of things” in “a defence of poetry.”

In “‘How fused our impressions are’: Virginia Woolf, John Keats et la couleur des mots,” **Catherine Lanone** traces the echoes of Keatsian synaesthesia in Woolf’s works, focusing on three landmarks, *Flush*, the essay “Walter Sickert” and *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf’s poetics of the fusion of the senses is analysed within the larger framework of interart dialogue. The author’s close reading highlights the significance of the correspondence between colours and words in texts that seek to delineate the emergence of the figural. The intensity of Keatsian sensations is also discussed in the next essay, “Tressage de sensation et hypersensibilité dans la poésie keatsienne” by **Laure-Hélène Anthony-Gerroltdt** who argues that Keatsian synaesthesia does not imply confusion between the senses but must be understood as a form of “hypersensitivity” that ties in with the poet’s quest for completeness. Against the traditional hierarchy of the senses, the privileged relation between the mind’s eye and the imagination is extended to the other senses, with a predilection for the haptic. Synaesthesia arises either from a blend of distinct sensations that are interwoven into the poems or from transfers between the senses, accounting for a form of poetic empathy.

**Leila Ghaleh-Taki**’s essay, “Ouverture synesthésique sur la poésie mystique persane. Étude des sens dans la poésie de Rûmi,” provides insight into Persian poetry and more specifically the 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic works of the poet Djalal-ûd-Dîn Mohammad Rûmi. In Rûmi’s poetry, the five senses are interconnected, but are also the figurative stages of a spiritual journey. The paradoxes that he expresses, such as stopping one’s ears to listen better, or hearing perfumes, suggest the changes required to reach the mystical union the poet desires. In “Words Mean Everything: The Poetry of Edwin Schlossberg,” **John Baker** studies the poetry installations of contemporary philosopher/designer Edwin Schlossberg.

The visual/auditory connections are relevant to his hybrid installations, and make us reflect on the presentation of synaesthetic/cross-modal experiences in the post-modern period.

This issue also includes two extra articles in a miscellanea section. In “Literature in the Expanded field: Intermediality at the Crossroads of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature”, **Jan Baetens** and **Domingo Sánchez-Mesa** explore the shift from comparative literature to comparative media studies and the position of literature within the field of multimedia and/or transmedial ‘convergence culture’. They undertake a terminological clarification of key notional terms based on the binary opposition between intermediality and transmediality, which involves a discussion of the related notions of text, medium and adaptation. Their paper provides a stimulating and most useful up-to-date overview of the critical literature in this field and it also introduces demediatization—their own interpretation of demediation—and serialization as the conceptual basis to understand transmedia storytelling as well as the contemporary evolution of print and digital culture.

**Antoine Hatzenberger’s** “Retour à l’Élysée : le jardin anglais revisité” focuses on English gardens. It offers the readers a synthesis of Michel Baridon’s thought on the subject, alongside an analysis of Rousseau’s views on gardens and the critical response to his writings. This is a fitting tribute to Michel Baridon’s work on the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which grew from gardens, but encompassed social, political and economic developments. Michel Baridon (1926-2009), who founded this journal, was an indefatigable scholar, and remains the inspirational figure for all of us involved in our annual conferences and the production of the journal. It is particularly relevant to end this volume on synaesthesia with an article on the English gardens he loved so much, and which were prime examples of cross-modal sensory experiences. As he often explained, the English garden had to be experienced through the combination of senses: the whispering winds in the branches, the play of shadows on moving streams, the colours fading through autumn...all these distinguished the English garden from its French counterpart, solemn and timeless. They made of the garden a kind of journey through time appealing to all our senses, and moved us away from cold reason to the warmer regions of empiricism.