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Exploring the One Sense: Synesthesia and Sensorial Language

In sensory synesthesia, a characteristic of one sensory perception manifests through another, as our brains integrate and connect diverse streams of information. Sensorial language, as an artistic and educational practice, offers a method for immersive engagement with multisensory experiences, allowing participants to explore synesthetic perception. While professional artists may be particularly predisposed to such experiences, synesthesia, to some degree, is accessible to all.

David Abram (1996) argues that although contemporary neuroscience often frames synesthesia as a rare or unusual phenomenon—seen in those who “see sounds” or “hear colors”—our primordial perception is inherently synesthetic. Merleau-Ponty (2006) similarly asserts that synesthetic perception is the default mode of sensory experience: it is only overlooked because scientific knowledge and habitual perception have conditioned us to separate the senses, focusing on what we “should” see, hear, or feel based on the organization of our bodies and the physical world.

In the context of sensorial performances, participants experience multiple sensory stimuli simultaneously. At times, these stimuli are perceived sequentially according to a prioritization (vision, touch, hearing, smell, taste), while at other moments they merge, producing synergistic effects. Closing the eyes often enhances these cross-modal interactions, deepening sensory integration. Vargas (2021) refers to this phenomenon as “one sense with multiple windows,” highlighting a phenomenological approach to understanding perception: a single, unified sense can access multiple modalities concurrently.

Merleau-Ponty (2012, 243) writes that seeing sounds or hearing colors reflects the body as a unified, synergistic system, where perception involves the whole sensory being resonating with stimuli across modalities rather than isolated senses. He also considers, that the body is not merely a collection of separate organs, but a synergistic system integrating all functions into the general movement of being in the world, representing existence itself. To claim “I see sounds” or “I hear colors” is meaningful only if vision or hearing are not treated as isolated qualities but as the experience of a modality of existence, a synchronization of the body with the phenomenon. Synesthetic experience arises when perception is understood as a response to a particular mode of movement or behavior: responding to a sound with one’s full sensory being, especially through the part responsible for perceiving color.

Through sensorial language, we can apply these principles in practice. Participants train sensory attention sequentially—focusing first on a single sense, then integrating additional senses, and eventually combining multiple modalities. This is not mindfulness meditation, but structured, active training of perceptual focus, enabling the development of synesthetic awareness. The monograph *The Art Of Sensorial Language* documents this method, demonstrating how structured practice can cultivate the potential for cross-modal perception and deepen engagement with multisensory experiences.

References:

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