

TITLE: Merging the Senses: Synaesthesia in Philosophy, Science and Art
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ABSTRACT

Perception through the senses is traditionally individuated on the basis of distinct sense organs: vision for the eyes, hearing through the ears, touch for hands and skin, smell through the nose and taste through the mouth. In this context, the possibility of transcending the limits between the different senses tends to be relegated to the imagination, a faculty whose role is largely to extrapolate beyond the sensory content of perception. The suggestion of seeing with one's ears or hearing with one's eyes verges towards the cranky or the hallucinatory. My aim is to question this assumption by outlining the discussion on synaesthesia, the atypical merging of the senses, a discussion which cuts across science, philosophy and art. I focus on the possibility of merging the sensory content of sight and hearing, specifically colour and sound, in three distinct phases: the scientific and philosophical discussion from Newton to Goethe; the artistic implications of research in human psychology and physiology in the second half of the nineteenth century; contemporary research and debate in neuroscience, related technologies and the philosophy of mind.