

SYNESTHETIC METAPHORS IN GEORG TRAKL'S POETRY: A NEUROCOGNITIVE SURVEY

Author: Sabrina Apa

Synesthesia is a neurological phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway. It has also been explained as an *iperconnection* of the whole brain, which allows the individual «to connect apparently not correlated concepts»¹.

According to the studies on this field, it seems that the synesthetic subjects have got particular mnemonic and creative skills. As a consequence it has emerged a clear relationship between the neurological procedure of synesthesia and the human creativity. In particular synesthetic subject would be more suitable to create *metaphors*.

Effectively the contemporary neurological researches have managed to show that existent relations between synaesthesia as physiological condition and the associations to form synesthetic metaphors. In the wake of this awareness it has been adopted here an interdisciplinary approach: there have been considered the existent interconnections between the synesthetic perception and the literary range, with particular reference to the creation of metaphors.

The attention has been focused on the studies of Sean Day, who show the similarities between synesthetic associations and synesthetic metaphors. He proposes a new perspective of the synesthetic metaphors «one which views synaesthetic metaphors as culturally and linguistically shaped, but with some neurological underpinnings»². This means that it is useful to make a difference between the everyday use of the synesthetic language, available to all people, and the

¹ V. S. Ramachandran, *Che cosa sappiamo della mente*, Mondadori, Milano 2006, p. 75 (my translation).

² S. A. Day, *Synaesthesia and Synaesthetic Metaphors*, in «PSYCHE», vol. 2 (July 1996) Tratto da: <http://psyche.cs.monash.edu.au/v2/psyche-2-32-day.html> (Data consultazione: 27 ottobre 2012)

synesthetic perception, only possible to a limited range of people The purpose here is the analysis of the synesthetic metaphors in Georg Trakl’s poetry, through a neurocognitive approach and on the basis Sean Day’s model. In particular he takes into account 6 senses, one more than traditional 5 sense, that is the temperature. He applies his model to literary text. Here an example of a Day’s table:

Table 1: list of synesthetic metaphors from <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i> by Thomas Pynchon (1973)		
Pag.		
3	smell --> taste	a sour smell
6	vision --> touch	humid green
10	hearing --> taste	the bitter chuckles
25	hearing --> touch	a sharp crack
25	hearing --> touch	a heavy explosion

Then the results are registered in a taxonomic table:

Table 2: Reckoning of a list of 122 synesthetic metaphors from <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i> by Thomas Pynchon (1973)							
Primary senses	Synesthetic senses						
	Hearing	Vision	Smell	Temperature	Taste	Touch	Total Primes
Hearing	n/a	0	0	0	1	2	3
Vision	0	n/a	0	0	0	1	1
Smell	0	0	n/a	0	1	0	1
Temperature	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0
Taste	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0
Touch	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0
Total	0	0	0	0	2	3	

Analysing a poetic text through this text make it easy to understand which synesthetic metaphor and which kind of sense prevails.

Moreover the senses have been ordered from the major positive value to the minor negative value in a third table.

Table 3: Ranking of senses selected by the synesthetic metaphors from <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i> by Thomas Pynchon (1973)		
	Secondary - Primary	Ranking
Touch	(3 - 0)	3
Taste	(2 - 0)	2
Temperature	(0 - 0)	0
Smell	(0 - 1)	-1
Vision	(0 - 1)	-1
Hearing	(0 - 3)	-3

After an accurate analysis of the wide corpus of Georg Trakl’s poetry has been proved the existence of a consistent number of synesthetic metaphors. The analysis has been made on 66 poems, 6 collections and 121 synesthetic metaphors.

It has been chosen here to use different colours to indicate different kinds of synesthetic connections. This method gives us the possibility to easily understand, which kind of synaesthesia prevails in the Georg Trakl’s poetry.

- hearing-touch
 hearing-taste
 taste-sight
 hearing-smell
 touch-taste
- hearing-sight
 sight-temperature
 sight-hearing
 smell - sight
- smell-taste
 sight-taste
 temperature-sight
 sight-touch

Table 1: List of synesthetic metaphors from “Gedichte”			
“Die Raben”	hearing → touch	harter Schrei	hard cry (v.2)

“Die Raben”	hearing → sight	braune Stille	dark silence (v.5)
“Im roten Laubwerk voll Gitarren...”	hearing → taste	süß singen	sweetly sing (v.7)
“Im roten Laubwerk voll Gitarren”	sight → temperature	lauer Himmel	lukewarm sky (v.13)
“Melancholie des Abends”	sight → temperature	kalter Glanz	cold glare (v.12)
“Rondel”	hearing → taste	sanfte Flöten	mild flutes (v.3)
“In einem verlassenem Zimmer”	smell → taste	duftet süß	smell sweet (v.17)
“Der Gewitterabend”	hearing → sight	glitzernd braust	sparkling thunders (v.15)
“Traum des Bosen”	hearing → sight	braungoldne Klänge	golden-brown sounds (v.1)
“Geistliches Lied”	hearing → sight	blauer Odem	blue breath (v.3)
“Geistliches Lied”	hearing → taste	sacht (ein morsches Gitter) geht	mildly opens (a rotten gate) (v.15)
“Geistliches Lied”	sight → taste	Sanft (ein Hirt vom Hügel) geht	mildly climb down (from the hill a shepherd) (v.21)
“Im Herbst”	hearing → taste	Tönt sanft (die Geige) her	sweetly resound (the violin) (v.7)
“Die Bauern”	sight → hearing	tönendes Grün und Rot	ringing green and red (v. 1)
“Winkel am Wald”	smell → taste	süß duften	smell sweet (v. 10)
“Im Winter”	sight → temperature	Leuchtet weiß und kalt	white and cold sparkle (v. 1)
“Verwandlung”	hearing → touch	Flöten weich	soft flutes (v. 11)
“Kleines Konzert”	hearing → sight	dunkle Stimmen	dark voices (v. 19)
“Menscheit”	hearing → taste	sanftes Schweigen	sweet silence (v. 7)
“Heiterer Frühling”	sight → temperature	lauer Strahl	lukewarm ray (v. 22)
“Heiterer Frühling”	hearing → taste	süßer fließt (ihr Odem)	sweeter flows (their breath) (v. 32)
“Rosenkranzlieder”	hearing → sight	schmales Lächeln	thin laughter (v. 6)
“Ein Herbstabend”	temperature → sight	feuchte Bläue	moist azure (v. 7)
“Menschliches Elend”	hearing → sight	gräßliches Geschrei	awful cry (v. 17)
“Im Dorf”	sight → temperature	feuchter Bläue	azure moist (v.

			24)
“Im Dorf”	sight → temperature	kühle Dunkel	cool dark (v. 30)
“Im Dorf”	hearing → sight	roter Abendwind	red wind (v. 35)
“Abendlied”	hearing → sight	dunkler Wohlaut	dark melody (v. 13)
“Helian”	hearing → taste	sanfte Sonate	sweet sound (v. 8)
“Helian”	hearing → taste	sanfte Saitenspiel	sweet arpeggi (v. 36)
“Helian”	hearing → smell	balsamischer Wind	balm-like wind (v. 73)
“Helian”	hearing → taste	sanfter Gesang	sweet song (v. 76)
“Helian”	smell → taste	Des Weihrauchs Süße	the sweetness of the incense (v. 89)
“Helian”	hearing → sight	purpurner Nachtwind	purplish nighty wind (v. 89)
“Nachtlied”	sight → hearing	stille Spiegel	silent mirrors (v. 7)
List of synesthetic metaphors from: “Sebastian in Traum”			
“Kindheit”	hearing → taste	<u>Sanft</u> (ist der Amsel) <u>Klage</u>	<u>Sweet is the blackbirds’lament</u> (v. 6)
“Stundenlied”	smell → taste	süßer duften	smell sweet (v. 16)
“Unterwegs”	hearing → sight	rote Stille	red silent (v. 12)
“Unterwegs”	hearing → taste	sanfte Glocken	sweet bells (v. 15)
“Landschaft”	hearing → sight	dunkle Rufe	dark cries (v. 1)
“Elis”	hearing → sight	blaue Stille	azure silent (v. 12)
“Elis”	hearing → sight	dunkler Gesang	dark song (v. 13)
“Elis”	hearing → taste	sanftes Glockenspiel	sweet ringing (v. 16)
“Hohenburg”	hearing → sight	Die Silberstimme des Windes	The silvery voice of the wind (v. 12)
“Sebastian in Traum”	hearing → sight	blaues Lüftchen	blu puff (v. 33)
“Sebastian in Traum”	hearing → sight	rosige Osterglocke	rosy Easter bell (v. 42)
“Sebastian in Traum”	hearing → sight	Silberstimmen	silvery voices

			(v. 43)
“Sebastian in Traum”	hearing→sight	Die Silberstimme	silvery voice (v. 55)
“Abend in Lans”	hearing→sight	purpurnes Lachen	purplish laughed (v. 4)
“Abend in Lans”	smell→sight	dunkle Düfte	dark smells (v. 5)
“Am Mönchsberg”	temperature→sight	Die dunkle Gestalt der Kühle	The dark figure of the cold (v. 3)
“Kaspar Hauser Lied”	hearing→sight	dunkle Klage	dark lament (v.9)
“Kaspar Hauser Lied”	hearing→touch	leiser Schritt	soft step (v.15)
“Verwandlung des Bösen”	hearing→sight	silberner Schritt	silvery step (v. 49)
“Verwandlung des Bösen”	hearing→sight	schwarzes Schreiten	black step (v. 1)
List of synesthetic metaphors from “Das Herbst des Einsamen”			
“Sonja”	hearing→sight	blaue Stille	azure silence (v. 29)
“Sonja”	hearing→sight	blaue Glocken	blue bells (v. 9)
“Sonja”	hearing→taste	sanfte Stille	sweet silence (v. 10)
“Entlang”	hearing→sight	Blaues Orgelgeleier	azure litany of the pipe organ (v. 12)
“Herbstseele”	hearing→touch	<u>Schreit</u> (der Habicht) <u>hart</u>	The hawk <u>harshley</u> <u>cries</u> (v. 4)
“Herbstseele”	hearing→sight	schwarzes Stille	black silence (v. 6)
“Afra”	hearing→sight	Lächeln rot	red laughter (v. 3)
List of synesthetic metaphors from: “Siebengesang des Todes”			
“Anif”	hearing→sight	bläulicher Witterung	Azure airing (v. 8)
“Geburt”	sight→touch	mösige Blicke	mossy look (v. 3)
“Geburt”	sight→temperature	kalter Mond	cold moon (v. 6)
“An einen	taste→sight	purpurne Süße	purplish

Frühverstorbenen”			sweetness (v. 5)
“An einen Frühverstorbenen”	hearing → sight	blauen Glocken	azure bells (v. 14)
“Geistliche Dämmerung”	hearing → taste	sanfte Flöten	sweet flutes (v.5)
“Geistliche Dämmerung”	hearing → sight	Mondene Stimme	lunar voice (v.11)
“Abendländisches Lied”	hearing → sight	grüne Stille	green silence (v. 6)
“Abendländisches Lied”	hearing → taste	süßer Gesang	sweet song (v. 12)
“Verklärung”	hearing → sight	dunkler Gesang	dark song (v. 15)
“Föhn”	hearing → sight	blinde Klage	blind lament (v. 1)
“Der Wanderer”	hearing → sight	Silbertönen	silvery tones (v. 2)
“Siebengesang des Todes”	hearing → taste	sanfte Klage	sweet lament (v. 3)
“Siebengesang des Todes”	hearing → taste	sanfter Gesang	sweet song (v. 9)
“Siebengesang des Todes”	hearing → sight	dunkle Klage	dark lament (v. 16)
“Winternacht”	temperature → sight	schwarzer Frost	black freezing (v. 4)
“Winternacht”	smell → taste	nach Bitterem schmeckt die Luft	The air smells bitter (v. 4)
“Winternacht”	sight → taste	<u>Bitterer</u> (Schnee und) <u>Mond</u>	<u>bitter</u> (snow and) <u>moon</u> (v. 10)
List of synesthetic metaphors from: “Gesang des Abgeschiedenen”			
“Vorhölle”	temperature → sight	goldene Kühle	goldene cold (v. 9)
“Vorhölle”	hearing → temperature	schneeige Stille	snowy silence (v. 29)
“Gesang einer gefangenen Amsel”	hearing → sight	dunkler Odem	dark breath (v. 1)
“Jahr”	hearing → sight	dunkle Stille	dark silence (v. 1)
“Frühling der Seele”	smell → sight	Purpurne Nachttau	purplish nocturnal breeze (v.3)
“Frühling der Seele”	hearing → sight	dunkle Rufe	dark cries (v.6)
“Frühling der Seele”	sight → temperature	feuchte	moist shadows

		Schatten	(v. 8)
“Frühling der Seele”	hearing → sight	Grauen	grey stony silence
	hearing → touch	steinernen Schweigens	(v. 14)
“Frühling der Seele”	sight → hearing	schweigender Anblick	silent look (v. 21)
“Frühling der Seele”	hearing → taste	sanfter Gesang	sweet song (v. 28)
“Im Dunkel”	hearing → sight	dunkles Gespräch	dark words (v. 4)
“Gesang des Abgeschiedenen”	sight → temperature	feuchte Schatten	moist shadows (v. 4)
“Gesang des Abgeschiedenen”	temperature → sight	kühle Bläue	Azure cold (v. 17)
“Traum und Umnachtung”	hearing → sight	blaue Rauschen	blue swish (v.46)
“Traum und Umnachtung”	hearing → sight	purpurner Nachtwind	purplish wind (v.111)
“Traum und Umnachtung”	hearing → touch	harte Stimme	touch voice (v.115)
“Traum und Umnachtung”	sight → temperature	kalter Mond	cold moon (v.124)
“Traum und Umnachtung”	sight → touch	<u>Antlitz</u> der Mutter, <u>steinernen</u>	The stony face of the mother (v.128-129)
“Traum und Umnachtung”	sight → touch	steinerne Augen	stony eyes (v.148)
“Traum und Umnachtung”	hearing → taste	sanfte Stille	sweet silence (v.157)
List of synesthetic metaphors from : “Veröffentlichungen im Brenner 1914- 1915”			
“In Hellbrunn”	hearing → sight	blaue Klage	azure lament (v.1)
“Das Herz”	hearing → sight	dunkler Trompetenruf	The dark recall of the trumpet (v.13)
“Das Gewitter”	hearing → taste	sanftes Summen	sweet buzz (v.9)
“Das Gewitter”	hearing → sight	weiße Stimmen	white voices (v.16)
“Das Gewitter”	hearing → sight	goldener Kriegschrei	golden cries of war (v.21)

“Der Abend” ³	touch→taste	sanfte Umarmung	sweet hug (v.5)
“Die Schwermut”	hearing→sight	goldner Abendstille	golden evening silence (v.4)
“Die Heimkehr”	hearing→sight	goldner Odem	golden breath (v.5)
“Die Heimkehr”	temperature→sight	blaue Kühle	blue cool (v.18)
“Klage,I”	hearing→sight	Rot ertönt	Red ring out (v.17)
“Klage,II”	hearing→sight	dunkle Stimme	dark voice (v.7)
“Grodek”	hearing→taste	wilde Klage	sour lament (v.5)
“Grodek”	temperature→sight	mondne Kühle	lunar cold (v.9)
“Grodek”	hearing→sight	dunkle Flöten	dark flutes (v.14)
“Offenbarung und Untergang”	hearing→sight	dunkle Klage	dark lament (v.12)
“Offenbarung und Untergang”	hearing→sight	schimmernde Stille	sparkling silence (v.14)
“Offenbarung und Untergang”	hearing→sight	dunkle Stimme	dark voice (v.34)
“Offenbarung und Untergang”	hearing→sight	blaues Lachen	azure laughter (v.37)
“Offenbarung und Untergang”	temperature→sight	schwarze Kühle	black cool (v.38)
“Offenbarung und Untergang”	hearing→sight	blaue Klage	azure lament (v.57)
“Offenbarung und Untergang”	hearing→sight	weiße Stimme	white voice (v.62)

Then we put the results in the Table 2 in order to easily calculate the prevailing senses:

Table 2: Reckoning of a list of 121 synesthetic metaphors from <i>Georg Trakl's poetry</i> .							
Primary senses	Secondary senses						Summation of the primary senses
	Hearing	Sight	Smell	Temperature	Taste	Touch	
Hearing	n/a	58	1	0	21	6	86
Sight	3	n/a	0	10	2	3	18
Smell	0	2	n/a	0	4	0	6

Temperature	0	8	0	n/a	0	0	8
Taste	0	1	0	0	n/a	0	2
Touch	0	0	0	0	1	n/a	1
Summation	3	62	1	10	28	9	

The results of the occurrences are then:

- hearing → sight: 58 presences
- hearing → taste: 22 presences
- hearing → touch: 6 presences
- sight → temperature: 10 presences
- temperature → sight: 8 presences
- smell → taste: 4 presences
- sight → hearing: 3 presences
- sight → touch: 3 presences
- smell → sight: 2 presences
- taste → sight: 1 presences
- touch → taste: 1 presence

Looking at the **table 2** it emerges that *hearing* is the most widespread *primary sense*, that is the sense to which metaphors are conferred. *Sight* is the most widespread sense as *secondary sense*, that is the sense through which metaphors are expressed.

Table 3: Ranking of senses selected by the synesthetic metaphors from Georg Trakl's poems.		
	Secondary – Primary	Ranking
Sight	(62- 18)	44
Taste	(28 - 2)	26
Touch	(9-1)	8
Temperature	(10 - 8)	2

Smell	(1 - 6)	-5
Hearing	(3-86)	-83

As we have already seen in the previous table (table 2) it emerges that *sight* is the most relevant sense in Georg Trakl's poetry. The prevailing synaesthesia in Georg Trakl's poetry, sight, is the same commonly experienced by people affected by synaesthesia. According to this view it is possible to assume that synesthetic metaphor involving sight in Georg Trakl's poetry have been inspired by a true synesthetic perception. Synesthesia can effectively be experienced by a pharmacological condition, such as the ingestion of drogues or alcohol. If we consider that Trakl was addicted to drugs and alcohol, so it is possible to assume that he had really experienced synesthesia and transmitted his hallucinations, coming from these sensorial perception, to his poems. While reading Trakl's poems we often almost touch «the abysses of the psychotic experience»⁴. However the synesthetic creation prevails on the possible influence of the drugs. The images we find in the Trakl's poetry come from a «unknown world [...], from an archetypal zone of the psyche captured by the capability to order of the writing»⁵.

The synesthetic metaphors reflect on the one hand the existing antinomy in Georg Trakl's poetry. Some represent effectively the dark side of the author such as «the dark cry»⁶ of the ravens, the «dark voices»⁷, the «awful cry»⁸ of the human misery, the «dark armony»⁹, the «dark song»¹⁰, the «dark perfumes»¹¹, «the dark figure of the cold»¹². But others represent those «glimmer of light»¹³ which also in the Trakl's dark word emerge. These are for instance «a cold glare»¹⁴, «the

⁴ E. Borgna, *Come in uno specchio oscuramente*, Feltrinelli Editore, Milano 2007, pp.130-147, p.134 (my traslation)

⁵ I. Porena, *La verità dell'immagine*, cit. p.11.

⁶ *Die Raben*, v.2.

⁷ *Kleines Konzert*, v.19.

⁸ *Menschliches Elend*, v. 17.

⁹ *Abendlied*, v.13.

¹⁰ *Elis*, v.13.

¹¹ *Abend in Lans*, v.5.

¹² *Am Mönchsberg*, v.3.

¹³ G. Pulvirenti, *op.cit*, p.17 (my traslation)

¹⁴ *Melancholie des Abends*, v.12.

orphans who sweetly sing»¹⁵, the «lukewarm sky»¹⁶, the «sweet sounds»¹⁷, the «sweet smell»¹⁸, the «golden-brown sounds»¹⁹, the «sweet resound of the violin »²⁰. These are only a part of the whole range of metaphors analyzed.

Analysing all the synesthetic metaphors it has emerged that metaphors referring to the *bright* dimension of Georg Trakl prevail on those expressing a dark side. This discovery has made it possible to assume a *new interpretation* of the whole Georg Trakl's poetry.

The coloured sounds prevail in Georg Trakl's poetry work as instruments for an *escapism*, which characterizes Trakl's mature lyrical production.

Among all the involved senses in Georg Trakl's synesthetic metaphors, the sense of *sight* plays the most important role. Sight is the sense through which metaphors' concepts are expressed. And this is really interesting if we take into account the author's *visionary strategy*.

Georg Trakl's poetry is thoroughly permeated with contrasts expressing an «irreconcilable wound»²¹. But according to this new perspective it is possible to assume that synesthesia here represents an instrument of reconciliation, «armony (that) doesn't separate the ego, but becomes expression of the one»²². Synesthesia, here expressed by Georg Trakl's visionary strategy, could be the abstract place where every contrast is solved.

As a consequence the abstraction becomes word, and the metaphoric word of synesthesia is the instrument to say what is abstract. The evolution of the language in Trakl's poetry is comparable to that of the twentieth century's music and painting. The language in fact expresses through the «emancipation of sign»²³ «an abstract and absolute space»²⁴.

¹⁵ *Im roten Laubwerk voll Gitarren...*, v. 7.

¹⁶ *Im roten Laubwerk voll Gitarren...*, v. 13.

¹⁷ *Rondel*, v.3.

¹⁸ *In einem verlassenen Zimmer*, v. 17.

¹⁹ *Traum des Bosen*, v.1.

²⁰ *Im Herbst*, v.7.

²¹ Ivi, p.17 (my traslation)

²² G. Sotis , *L'universo sinestetico di Giuseppe Bonaviri*, from: jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/qua/article/download/10471/7409 (2 October 2012).

²³ G. Pulvirenti, *op. cit.*,p.31.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

The discrepancy between the objective representation and the subjective perspective, and that regarding the gap between the external world and inner one, is through this perspective solved.

The synesthesia, even if experienced through the use of drugs or alcohol, represents the successful escapism of the author. It is the place achieved by the *Abgeschiedener* in his long way far from the reality.

Trakl probably experiences synesthesia as a real sensorial perception and turn this into creation, namely synesthetic metaphors. This reaffirms the existence of a real connection between the perceptive dimension and an abstract one, that is synesthetic experience and creation. The existing synesthetic metaphors in Georg Trakl's poetry allow us to *touch with hand, hear with ears, taste with mouth* that abstract reality and connect it to the concrete experience of the common man.

In addition to the synesthetic metaphors regarding the coloured sounds, there exist many other synesthetic metaphors involving all the senses which connect us to the real world. This way the author establishes a connection between his inner world and the external one. According to this perspective synesthetic metaphors can be seen as a *bridge* between real and imaginary. It is here realized the «joint presence of realistic elements on the lexical level and of abstract outcomes in the composition».²⁵ The dualism between author and his work is so abolished. The language directly reflects the poet's dimension, «the work presents the author's form»²⁶.

²⁵ Ivi, p.27.

²⁶ I. Porena, *Introduzione a Georg Trakl*, cit. p. XX (my translation)

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