

In Search of the Colored Past

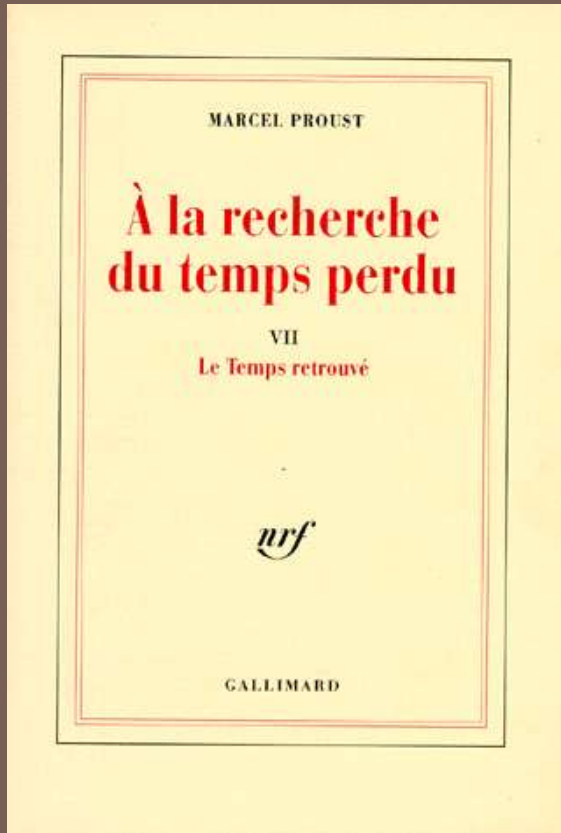
Analogies of Synesthesia and the Proust Effect

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Cretien van Campen

Synesthetics Netherlands www.synesthesie.nl

Marcel Proust - In Search of Lost Time



Questions

What are the similarities and differences between synesthetic perceptions and the Proust effect?

- on a phenomenological level
- on a neuropsychological level

Definition

Proust effect is an involuntary, vivid, emotional and multisensory experience of the past evoked by a single sensory stimulus

Features of the Proust effect

- involuntary
- vivid
- emotional/empathic
- uncommon collaboration of the senses
- constructive/creative
- memorial landmark/ not easy to forget

Definitions

Synesthesia is:

- a stimulation of one sensory domain leading to a perception in another sensory domain (Baron-Cohen 1997)
- the elicitation of perceptual experiences in the absence of the normal sensory stimulation (Ward & Mattingley 2006)
- a perceived Gestalt as a result of an uncommon collaboration of the senses (Van Campen 2009)

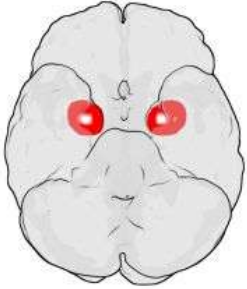
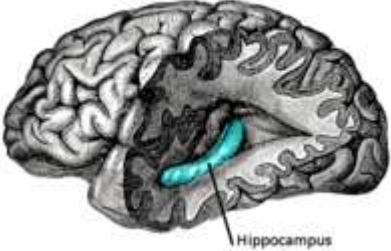
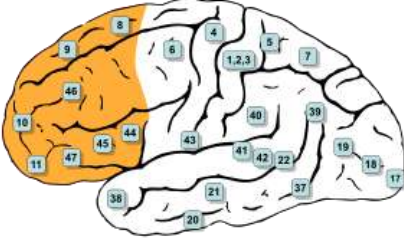
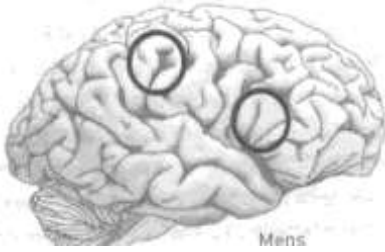
Features of Synesthesia

- involuntary and automatic
- spatially extended
- consistent and generic
- highly memorable
- laden with affect

Similarities and differences

Feature	Proust effect	Synesthesia
involuntary and automatic	yes	yes
located (physically)	yes	yes
consistent and generic	no or less	yes
highly memorable	yes	yes
laden with affect	yes	yes
vivid	yes	yes
collaboration of the senses	yes	yes

Neuropsychology of the Proust effect

			
Amygdalae	Hippocampus	Prefrontal cortex	Mirror neurons

a preliminary neuropsychological comparison

Feature	Involved brain function	Proust effect	Synesthesia
involuntary and automatic		?	?
located (physically)	mirror neurons	yes	?
consistent and generic			
highly memorable	hippocampus	yes	?
laden with affect	amygdala	yes	?
vivid	mirror neurons	yes	?
collaboration of the senses	hippocampus	yes	?

Conclusions

- Definitions of synesthesia do not exclude the Proust effect
- Six features in common: involuntary and automatic, physically located, highly memorable, laden with affect, vivid and show an uncommon collaboration of the senses
- Difference: synesthetic perceptions are consistent and non-pictorial
- On a neuropsychological level, there is insufficient evidence to make a proper comparison

Thank you



Forthcoming (in Dutch)

The Colored Past
Tales of the Memory of the Senses

Cretien van Campen

Synesthetics Netherlands
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