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The Man Who Tastes Shapes

By Keith Varnum

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Some people see, taste, hear and feel things the rest of us don't. James Wannerton tastes words: "New York is runny eggs. London is extremely lumpy mashed potatoes." Carol Steen sees every letter with a color: "Z is the color of beer, a light ale."

For Carol Crane, music is felt: "I always feel guitars on my ankles and violins on my face." Other people experience smells when exposed to shapes, or hear sounds inside taste. And for some, numbers have color, sounds have smell, and words have flavor. Music is not only heard, it's seen and tasted—the list goes on.

Neurologist Richard Cytowic explores this surreal world of "synesthesia" in his book, *The Man Who Tasted Shapes*. "Synesthesia means joined sensation, and some people are born with two or more of their senses hooked together," explains Cytowic.

The most common form of synesthesia is when a person see letters in different colors instead of seeing black ink letters as black. Although people differ from each other in what colors the letters are, the colors usually remain the same for each individual throughout their life.

Depending on what food they taste, other synesthetes experience taste as a shape, like a triangle or circle. Another person sees orange when feeling pain.

The Man Who Tastes Shapes

For New York artist Carol Steen, synesthesia is inspiration. She sees shapes and colors when listening to music or receiving acupuncture—images that she transforms into works of art. "It's like putting on sunglasses and being able to see the world through the sunglasses," she says. Once, when Steen injured her leg while hiking, all she saw was a world bathed in orange.

And, Carol Crane does more than simply hear a concert. She physically experiences each instrument within a different part of her body.

Still another person hears a sound that tastes like pickles. For

as long as he can recall, words have triggered the part of Wannerton's brain that responds to tastes and flavors. "I can remember being in a big school assembly hall listening to the Lords Prayer," he says, "and it was while listening to that, I used to get flavor after flavor coming in. It was mostly bacon."

Wannerton says his synesthesia causes him some discomfort in his personal life. "I've had girlfriends with names I couldn't stand saying. Tracey is a very strong flavored name and it's flaky—pastry. Whenever I was in her company, that's what I thought of constantly." And at the end of the day, he suffers from sensory overload. But still he doesn't want a cure. "I've had it since I can remember, and taking it away—I wouldn't like the thought of that," he says.

What's going on inside the synesthete's brain?

Dr. Vilayanur Ramachandran, a neurologist who studies quirks of the brain, was scanning the brain of McAllister, a man who sees music. During the imaging, the music being played stimulates not only McAllister's audio cortex, but also his visual cortex. "The visual area lit up in him," says Ramachandran, "so you know there was neurological activity in the visual region of his brain even though he was only listening to music." McAllister describes it as a "Fantasia—like experience: explosions of color all over the place. A bright flash of lavender getting dimmer and dimmer; now we're going over a pink staircase, some lavender violins. It looks very beautiful."

This is all the more surprising since McAllister is blind! He lost his sight when he was 12, the result of a degenerative eye disease. But he never lost his synesthesia.

The Man Who Tastes Shapes

Are we all born with joined sensation?

Though scientists can prove synesthesia exists physiologically, they still don't know what causes it. Some researchers think cross-wiring in the brain produces the phenomenon. Another theory is that everyone is born with synesthesia—that we, as infants, experience the world as a jumble of interwoven sensations. Then, as most of us mature, our physical senses slowly become distinct and sharply defined, like images being brought into focus by a camera lens. With synesthetes this doesn't happen.

For some, synesthetic perceptions seem to exist outside the body. Carrie Schultz describes how she sees electric guitar riffs in purple swirls that envelop her.

For others, the awareness is internal, in their "mind's eye." When Glenda Larcombe hears a truck backing up—making a beep-beep-beep sound—she sees the beeps as a series of red dots. The mingling of senses is often difficult for synesthetes to describe. Larcombe, for instance, said the red dots she sees when she hears beeping are not part of her actual vision. "It's not like I would see a red dot right in front of me—it's in my mind's eye" she says in an interview. She also reports feeling her interviewer's voice, "like a wave, like water, with yellow and orange."

Ex-journalist, Page Getz says "God is blue." She describes headache pain as a kind of greenish-orange, music by the rock group Nirvana as having the taste or sensation of Dr Pepper, and the color after sex as static silver. She quit her job as a journalist because her editors' word changes often disrupted what she saw as a sentence's natural chromatic progression.

Everyone's got blended senses to a degree

Psychologist Carol Mills says this sensory-blending ability might be a normal part of all adult brains. "It may go on in all of us even if we don't have synesthesia," said Mills. "For example, if I give you a very high-pitched note and a series of colors and ask you to match one, you are going to pick a light color. If I give you a low bass note, you are probably going to pick a dark color. The difference is when a synesthete hears a low note, they see dark. When they hear a high note, they see a light color."

The Man Who Tastes Shapes

No firm figures exist for how common synesthesia is. The best estimates range from 1 in 200 to 1 in 20,000.

Drawing from the wisdom of native and ancient spiritual traditions, Keith Varnum shares his 30 years of practical success as an author, personal coach, acupuncturist, filmmaker, radio host, restaurateur, vision quest guide and international seminar leader (The Dream Workshops). Keith helps people get the love, money and health they want with his FREE "Prosperity Ezine" at www.TheDream.com.

Choose Your Own Jewelry Styles

By George Williams

When you want to buy jewelry, you have to choose the one that can compliment a formal outfit or for daily wear. It is not cheap to buy one, so think carefully before you decide. If you make the right decision, that chosen jewelry styles can draw attention to your best features or possibly camouflage less desirable areas. Your choice of jewelry style will subtly affect others perceptions, so what guidelines are there to help you select the most flattering jewelry?

Earrings:

The main factor when choosing earring is your face shape. Face shape is important when selecting earrings. Face shapes are generally grouped as: oval, rectangle, round, heart and square.

Individuals with an oval face shape can wear any style while other people should look for styles that contrast their face shape. Selecting a hoop or button style for a round face would only emphasize the round shape. Square or long shapes will de-emphasize a round face. The same is true with other face shapes; a long, rectangular face should stay away from long, dangling earrings and choose smaller studs instead. Square faces need the softness of round or hoop earrings and heart shaped faces are complimented with triangular shapes with a wide base that contrasts a narrow chin.

Necklace:

Your choice of necklace can minimize or emphasize your size. If you want to create or emphasize a taller appearance choose longer necklaces and V shapes. A necklace that falls past the bustline but above the waist will elongate while a choker style or shorter U shaped necklace resting on the breast bone will shorten your appearance.

The size of your necklace should also be considered. Fuller figures can compliment their proportions with larger, chunkier pieces that would overwhelm an individual with a smaller frame.

Bracelets and Rings:

Similar guidelines should be followed with bracelets and rings as with necklace choice. Women of average build and height will find a wide bracelet most complimentary. Petite women should look for more delicate pieces and tall or full figured women should layer several small or wide bracelets,

The Man Who Tastes Shapes

avoiding very delicate pieces that can look lost.

When selecting rings make sure that the setting doesn't cover your knuckle which not only will cause fingers to look short but can interfere with movement and comfort.

Shorter fingers benefit from oval settings while longer fingers look best with wide bands or simple, round settings.

What you like and want to own:

While these guidelines may influence the type of jewelry you select you can be sure that there are

many, many choices for all tastes and occasions regardless of your shape or size.

The above are guidelines. The most important of all is choosing what you love. It is you who wear them. Even though those chosen ones are perfect for your face shape and size, you do not like them.

There is no point to buy. Use your feeling to decide which one is best for you.

George Williams maintains many website about purse, including

and

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