

GLASGOW COLOUR STUDIES GROUP

Notes following the Fourth Meeting, 30th January 2008

The fourth meeting of the GCSG was attended by about twenty-five people, and took place in the Seminar Room, Dept of Psychology, University of Glasgow. Thanks are due to David Simmons, who organized the venue, Carole Hough, who acted as master of ceremonies, and to Christian Kay and Rachel Smith who organized the refreshments.

Apologies were received from David Forrest, Alexander Logvinenko, and Niall Logan.

The title of the Fourth Meeting was ‘Is Wednesday Green or Red?: an Exploration of Aspects of Synaesthesia’

Dr Julia Simner, Research Fellow, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Science, University of Edinburgh gave an introduction to the subject of synaesthesia, describing the various forms it can take, and some of the research currently being undertaken.

This was followed by presentations, and then a discussion session led by two synaesthetes, Prof. Christian Kay, Professor of English Language, University of Glasgow, and Ms Valerie Thornton, Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow, University of Glasgow. These speakers gave a fascinating view (to non-synaesthetes) of their experiences, and readily answered the audience’s questions. Valerie gave a reading of a story she had written which was clearly influenced by her synaesthesia. The contrast between parsley-green and bottle-green was a memorable theme in this piece.

The three speakers earlier supplied the following abstract:

Synaesthesia, sometimes described as ‘cross-wiring’ in the brain, is a condition whereby sensations normally regarded as separate are automatically linked in an individual’s brain. Its commonest manifestation is an association between colour and forms such as letters, numbers and names of days. Its main characteristic is that it begins in childhood and the links are consistent throughout the synaesthete’s lifetime. Each synaesthete, however, has his (or more commonly her) unique set of links. Thus for Synaesthete A, ‘Wednesday’ and ‘5’ are both green, whereas for B they are yellow and red respectively. Underlying these are general trends, such as the fact that A is most likely to be red and O to be black or white. Other forms of synaesthesia include links across modalities of the brain, such as associations between colour and sound or taste. There is a possible link with creativity: known synaesthetes include artists (Hockney, Kandinsky), musicians (Hendrix, Messiaen, Scriabin), writers (Baudelaire, Nabokov, Rimbaud).

Please note that the speakers would be delighted to hear from anyone else in the Colour Studies Group who has experience of synaesthesia. Contact Christian Kay: c.kay@englang.arts.gla.ac.uk

Thanks to all three speakers who made this synaesthesia session so memorable.

News

- There are now 62 members of the Group.
- Please do not forget to make your £1 contribution to refreshments if you intend to partake. (A cash container is provided on the refreshments table).
- Don't forget to use our email discussion list to discuss anything to do with colour. The address is ColourStudies@www.jiscmail.ac.uk Why not continue to ask questions about synaesthesia?

Considerations for the Fifth Meeting

Date:

- Date and venue will be announced later by means of the email distribution list, so be sure to inform Carole Biggam if you change your address.

Talks

- If anyone would like to volunteer a talk or session, please contact Carole Biggam. You may like to offer a talk for a particular future meeting, not necessarily the next one, but please get in touch as soon as possible.
- As stated at the first meeting, we do not want to exclude any format for future meetings, and, indeed, it would be good to have as much variety as possible, e.g. single lectures, collections of short talks, seminars on particular subjects, short talks on a particular theme etc.