

Synesthesia Writing Exercise [10/11/2004]

Part 1.

Start with an auditory phenomenon such as a piece of music, an environmental sound, or even a particular auditory environment such as a certain interior (or exterior) building space. Listen to the sound or sound environment while you are writing. Describe the auditory phenomenon as accurately as you can without using any auditory or sound-related words. That is, you must think about sound as though it were full of colors, temperatures, textures, scents, flavors, and even kinesthetic sensations. For example, one poet wrote a piece that transfigured sounds into the way one would dance to them; she “choreographed” the sound and made herself the “dancer.” Try to invent at least ten good lines for whatever you are describing.

Part 2.

Start with a visual art work or any available visual phenomenon, and really look at it in terms of its components, its textures, its light-dark values, etc. Always keep the thing in front of you and/or in the forefront of your consciousness. Then describe the thing as accurately as you can but without using any visual words. You have to transfigure your visual ideas into sound, smell, touch, taste, and kinesthesia ideas. Try to invent at least ten good lines for whatever you are describing.

Part 3.

Look over your best lines from both of the above and combine them into one poem about one thing (or a few related things).

(See the Public Dreaming Variation....)

Public Dreaming Variation

Someone said that the artist is like a public dreamer, i.e. the artist is one who dreams for the sake of the public. In this variation of the synesthesia exercise, first you start with a dream that is vivid and meaningful to you. It could be one of your own dreams, the dream of someone you know, or even a famous dream that you read about in a psychology book. Write down the essential parts of the dreams (the main images, the main “plot” if there is one, the primary sounds, colors, tastes, and any other sensory information).

Second, take the most important visual elements of the dream and transfigure them into any or all of the other senses.

Repeat this process for all the auditory elements, and transfigure them into any or all of the other senses. Then repeat this for any other important elements of the dream.

Advice: copy out the entire dream by hand from start to end at least three times and revise it until it makes a complete or “finished” draft.