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THE SYNAESTHETIC ARTIST: MANIFESTATIONS OF SYNAESTHESIA IN SELECTED ARTWORKS

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, which I submit in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Technologiae (Fine Art) in the Department of Visual Art, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg, is, apart from the acknowledged assistance, and unless otherwise indicated, my own work, and has not been submitted by me to another institution to obtain a research diploma or degree.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study centres on the ‘condition’ of synaesthesia, which is a crossing of the human senses, resulting in one sense automatically triggering another. Particular aspects of synaesthesia, namely grapheme and sound-colour synaesthesia as well as the relationship between synaesthesia and metaphor, are examined, specifically those related to selected contemporary artists whose experiences have a direct bearing on their processes and artworks. This context facilitates an analysis of my own grapheme synaesthetic-based artwork. The research question is framed through a phenomenological lens with particular focus upon embodiment, in that synaesthesia can best be described as an embodied experience in which the synaesthete literally sees/feels colours, shapes and sounds. In order for a viewer to understand a synaesthetic artwork, he or she must first familiarise themselves with the artist’s particular type of synaesthetic associations. Once this has been established, it is possible for the viewer to appreciate the experiences of that synaesthete and thus their resultant artworks.

In this research, I conduct a critical comparative analysis of selected works by contemporary artists Neil Harbisson, Melissa McCracken and Daniel Tammet so as to contextualise and analyse my own body of practical work. Synaesthesia is still relatively new as a field of research, since it was only established as a ‘real’ condition in the late 1970s. Therefore much is still to be learned about the phenomenon, especially from an artistic, rather than a neurological, point of view.

Being a synaesthete myself, this research is not only personally apposite, but it also enables me to provide key insights into embodied experiences of synaesthesia through an analyses of my current body of work and a consideration as to how similarities and differences might be found in relation to the works of my selected artists. My work not only explores manifestations of synaesthesia, but also addresses ideals of freedom and the notion of the synaesthetic artist as other. By examining the way in which my selected artists explore synaesthesia in their work, I hope to shed light on the embodied experience of artmaking for the synaesthetic artist.

Key words: Synaesthhsia, Phenomenology, Embodiment, Melissa McCracken, Neil Harbisson, Daniel Tammet, Freedom
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Chapter One: Introduction

Imagine you wake up in the middle of the night, ravenous. You open your fridge and have a good long look at what is inside.

You look at the leftover roast but say to yourself, "No, I'm not in the mood for arches." Or, contemplating a slice of lemon meringue pie, decide you are not hungry for points. You dismiss the thought of a peanut butter sandwich because you know you could not sleep well if you stuffed yourself full of spheres and circles. There you stand, bathed in the refrigerator light, casting your eye from shelf to shelf. You shift your feet against the cool floor and finally take a slice of chocolate mint pie. As you do, you feel a dozen columns before you, invisible to the eye but real to the touch. You set the fork down and run your hand up and down their cool, smooth surfaces. As you roll the minty taste in your mouth, your outstretched hand rubs the back curve of one of the columns. What a sumptuous sensation. The surface feels cool, refreshing, even sexual in a way (Michael Watson quoted in Cytowic 1993:sp).

You are not crazy, you’re simply, like Michael Watson, a synaesthete.

For a ‘condition’ first discovered in the 1800s, surprisingly little has been written; the majority of the research on synaesthesia only having been undertaken in recent years. This is largely due to the belief that synaesthesia was not a true condition, but rather a manifestation of the imagination induced through memory (Hubbard & Ramachandran 2003:53). Having said this, synaesthesia was a topic of fascination between the years 1860 and 1930. Many artists and musicians explored aspects of synaesthesia in order to create art, although at that time synaesthesia was still seen as a metaphor rather than a cross sensory condition (Baron-Cohen & Harrison 1997:21). Synaesthesia is experienced in various forms, the most common being visual-auditory synaesthesia also known as coloured-hearing synaesthesia (Baron-Cohen & Harrison 1997:50). The type of synaesthesia I have is grapheme synaesthesia, where letters of the alphabet and words are associated with colour.

Research has mainly been conducted in the fields of neurology and psychology, however scientists such as Simon Baron-Cohen, Edward Hubbard, Vilayanur Ramachandran and Richard Cytowic have discovered that there are many more links between the senses in synaesthetes than was first thought. There are several artists, however, who are believed to have been synaesthetes, such as Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) who was fascinated by the condition and not only wrote about it, but explored it through his art. It is

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1 I use the word *condition*, here, in inverted commas, because although synaesthesia is now an accepted field in neurology and psychology, it is not yet established as a medical condition (Cytowic & Eagleman 2009:19).
believed and explained by Amy Ione and Christopher Tyler (2003:223-226) that Kandinsky saw colours and shapes when he heard music and he described some of his abstract works as representations of his cross-sensory experience.

Existing research has been conducted from an ‘outsider’s perspective’, but I have conducted my research from the point of view of a practicing synaesthetic artist. Being a grapheme synaesthete, as well as an artist, has led me to experience feelings of otherness throughout my life. Rather than feeling ashamed of my otherness, however, I chose to embrace it through my art and through grappling with notions of freedom. The counter-culture movements and music of the 1960s and 1970s resonated with me at a young age; it continues to embody my love of freedom and artistic expression and is often prominent in my artwork. Due to my type of synaesthesia, various forms of text have become an important aspect of my work. Reading colour (2009) is a multi-layered artist’s book installation. The concept of the work is freedom of expression through synaesthesia. In this work, I translated Salman Rushdie’s Haroun and the sea of stories (1990), letter by letter into colour, using my personal coloured alphabet as reference. Haroun was written by Rushdie while he was in exile and the novel, written as a children’s book, deals with issues of freedom of speech and freedom of expression. It is a deeply significant book in my life, as it was the first English novel I ever read.

Reading colour features 12 pages from the translated novel printed as A2 pages; each of which is accompanied by a different protest song, dealing with various issues. The songs included Where have all the flowers gone? by Peter Paul and Mary (1962), Buffalo soldier by Bob Marley (first released posthumously in 1983) and Working class hero by John Lennon (1970). The visual presence of the lyrics of each protest song was distinguished by one particular word that had been coloured according to my personal alphabet. The letters comprising that word were allowed to shine through each block of colour. This word could also be found on the A2 pages from the Rushdie text. This meant that the reader would be able to find the colour pattern and consequently know which letter was represented by which

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2 I was born in 1986; my parents exposed me to the music of the 1960s and 1970s throughout my formative years. In addition, I was raised in a house filled with literature where liberal thought was encouraged. In the year of my birth, South Africa was perched on the edge of civil war. P W Botha’s so-called Crossing the Rubicon speech had been made one year earlier, and during 1986, a state of emergency was declared in the country. My love of 1960s counter-culture movements will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

3 Due to my mother tongue being Afrikaans, I read Haroun around the age of 10 or 11.
colour. Thus, it was possible for the reader to be able to theoretically translate the novel back from colours into letters, with the help of the famous song lyrics, as indexical keys.

The work was exhibited on a pedestal, in a dark room with a spotlight focused on the book’s pages. This was a decision I took with the intention of making the viewer uncomfortable, conveying the idea that they would be expected to read out loud from a book that is written in a language they do not understand and cannot read. In order to read, the viewer must first search, learn and understand. This is the frustration one might feel when one’s freedom is taken away, it is also the frustration that a synaesthete might feel when trying to convey what they experience daily.

1.1. Practical component

The practical component of my current study comprises an installation, an artist’s book and a number of contextualising works. The installation *Throwing Stones: Paradoxical freedoms* (2016-2018) consists of 28 mixed media works which are 840x1200mm in size, digital and screen prints, which feature both readable and synaesthetically translated texts – my synaesthetic alphabet – as well as three A2 pages from novels, where the letters are masked with my coloured alphabet, but still shine through. These three pages and the artist’s book are placed at the entrance of the exhibition and thus contextualise my body of practical work. The work unpacks the theme of freedoms and, through a close reading of the artist’s book as well as the 31 accompanying works, the viewer should be able to decipher not only my synaesthetic language, but the meanings of various freedoms embedded in the exhibition as a whole.

1.2 Theoretical framework

The study examines the manifestations of synaesthesia in art framed through the theoretical lens of phenomenology and, particularly, embodiment. Anna Rowland (2012) argues that, in order to fully appreciate an artwork, the entire body needs to engage with the work. This study focuses not only on how the viewer of an artwork engages with the piece, but also on the embodied experience of the synaesthetic artist and what they perceive to be their reality whilst creating synaesthetically induced art.
French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) (in Edie 1964:17) argues: “I will never know how you see red, and you will never know how I see it; but this separation of consciousness is recognised only after a failure of communication”. For a synaesthete, this argument is particularly apt, since the colour red could mean so much more: red could be the letter A as it is for me, a musical note, a particular taste or even a texture. The synaesthetic artist tries to communicate this embodied synaesthetic experience with the viewer, in order to explain their perception of red.

1.3 Methodology

This research comprises a qualitative research paradigm which supports three approaches:

Firstly, I have applied a critical literature analysis to both the condition of synaesthesia, and to particular works by the contemporary artists I have selected to focus on through the theoretical frames of phenomenology and embodiment. This assists in contextualising synaesthesia and the above-mentioned artists who work with the condition. Secondly, I have conducted a critical and visual analysis of my selected artists’ works and have compared them with my own; and thirdly, by exploring my own synaesthesia, I have undertaken a body of practical work for the purposes of an exhibition.

1.4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the study is to examine the synaesthetic experiences of selected artists, with particular reference to how synaesthesia manifests in specifically chosen artworks. The artists I focus on are Neil Harbisson (b. 1984), a self-described cyborg artist; Melissa McCracken (b. 1990), an audio-visual synaesthete who creates paintings of songs; and Daniel Tammet (b. 1979), who creates works depicting his various cross-sensory synaesthetic associations with numbers.

Although synaesthesia is now an accepted area of study in the fields of neurology and psychology, little has been written concerning the synaesthetic artist and the manifestation of synaesthesia in their artwork. Thus my study has two objectives: The first is to contextualise

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The “failure of communication” forms a prominent part of my artmaking process and is discussed in Chapter Three.
synaesthesia, explain what it is and how it manifests in the work of artists who have explored synaesthesia in the past. The second is to demonstrate the embodied manifestations of synaesthesia through visual and critical analyses of selected works of contemporary artists as well as my own work. Being a grapheme synaesthete as well as a practicing synaesthetic artist I am in a unique position to critically and visually analyse not only the work of my selected artists, but also my own work.

As each synaesthete has different cross-sensory associations, it is therefore important to understand the particular type of synaesthesia associated with each artist. This analysis, together with my body of practical artwork, in which my embodied experiences of grapheme synaesthesia are explored, might provide a better understanding of artworks which embody synaesthesia, and thus contribute to the research field.

1.5 Chapter outline and associated literature

Chapter Two This chapter positions and unpacks phenomenology and embodiment as useful theoretical frameworks to analyse my selected artists’ works. The chapter also contextualises and explains synaesthesia; it addresses how synaesthesia is manifest and it includes a brief history of the condition and of the artists who have explored it in the past. Several key authors and researchers in the field of synaesthesia feature in this chapter, which include American neurologist Richard Cytowic (b. 1952), British psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen (b. 1958) and British researcher John E. Harrison (date of birth unknown).

Cytowic reintroduced the topic into the field of research in his publications which include *A union of the senses* (2002) and *The man who tasted shapes* (1993). The latter publication was inspired by the host of a dinner party he attended. This person said that the sauce for the chicken he was making did not have ‘enough points’ yet. The host literally tasted shapes and encouraged Cytowic to conduct deeper research into this phenomenon.

A key text that has major relevance for my research is Baron-Cohen and Harrison’s *Synaesthesia: Classic and contemporary readings* (1997). This work is an anthology of the writings of key authors on synaesthesia, including a chapter by Cytowic.⁵ It also contains the

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⁵ This chapter is titled *Synaesthesia: Phenomenology and neuropsychology – A review of current knowledge*. In it, Cytowic explores how synaesthesia might impact consciousness, reason and emotion.
written history of synaesthesia and an exploration of artists, such as Kandinsky, who are thought to have created artworks exploring the idea of synaesthesia. Baron-Cohen and his colleagues invented the test of Genuineness in 1987; it was the first step in distinguishing synaesthetes from non-synaesthetes. Baron-Cohen is relevant not only as an editor of this particular text, but as a key researcher of synaesthesia in the fields of psychology.

Edward M. Hubbard and Vilayanur S. Ramachandran are two leading researchers in the field of synaesthesia. They devised several tests which distinguish synaesthetes from non-synaesthetes. Their work *Hearing colours, tasting shapes* (2003) explains the methods used and the results attained by their specific tests working particularly in the field of neurology. The diagrams used to explain the tests are particularly useful in this chapter where they help to graphically contextualise synaesthesia.

Francesca Bacci and David Melcher’s *Art and the senses* (2011) specifically explores how art and the senses collide or play off one another. The text includes a chapter which deals exclusively with synaesthesia whilst the foreword, written by United Kingdom (UK) researcher Siân Ede, is relevant as it sheds light on art and the phenomenological as well as embodied experience, questions of metaphor, texts and how humans perceive art and the world.

Phenomenology is the practice of exploring phenomena, perceived by the senses (Emmerling 2005:214). The founder of phenomenology, Czech-born philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), explains how “human beings experience the external world as objects of consciousness” (Emmerling 2005:214). Merleau-Ponty elaborates on Husserl’s ideas and focuses the perception of human beings on the body rather than the mind. He states: “In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it, we are given over to the object and we merge into this body which is better informed than we are about the world” (Merleau-Ponty in Rowland 2012:9). Therefore, according to Merleau-Ponty, perception becomes an embodied experience. Synaesthesia is a phenomenon perceived by the senses, but also caused by the synaesthete’s senses. Therefore in order to explain synaesthesia as well as the nature of reality. Cytowic refers to specific subjects/synaesthetes who explain their experience of synaesthesia and how the phenomenon is a real and truly embodied experience for the synaesthete.
and the process of artmaking I use phenomenology and embodiment as lenses to help explain the synaesthetes’ experiences.

Rowland, in *Bodies moved, moved bodies: A phenomenological study of embodied experience in Olafur Eliasson’s installations* Your Blind Passenger and Your Negotiable Panorama (2012), applies the theory of embodiment to her own reaction when she encounters the work of Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967). Her observations as well as Eliasson’s writing on his own work are of consequence to my study.

Chapter Three: This chapter focuses on the analysis of the synaesthetic conditions of the artists I have elected to examine, as well as a consideration of specific works they have made which embody or manifest synaesthesia. In order to fully comprehend the artists’ experiences, it is crucial to gain relevant information from the synaesthetic artist him/herself, since each synaesthete’s experience differs. Autistic savant\(^6\) and synaesthete Tammet has written two works about his life explaining his condition and perceptions of the world, titled *Born on a blue day* (2006) and *Thinking in numbers* (2012), respectively. Of particular relevance to my study is Tammet’s unique synaesthetic ability. Tammet has various types of synaesthesia, particularly relating to numbers. In his art Tammet attempts to portray the colour, shape and personality which he associates with each number.

Cyborg artist Harbisson was born colour blind, but in 2003, when he was 19 years old, had an antenna inserted into his brain. This device ‘reads’ colours for him and translates each colour into sound vibrations. Harbisson uses these vibrations to create ‘sound portraits’ of individuals. Harbisson has written several papers explaining his condition and artmaking process, which, along with several interviews with the artist, help to explain his ‘induced synaesthesia’ and which also help to facilitate my critical and visual analysis of his artwork.

McCracken experiences colour-sound synaesthesia and creates paintings of songs. Her work is a direct translation of the shapes and colours she sees when listening to a specific song. She explains her methods and condition on her website http://www.melissasmccracken.com/

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\(^6\) Savant syndrome refers to a person with a disability such as autism, who can perform remarkable feats such as learning Icelandic in a week, which Tammet accomplished. This kind of condition is rare and little is known of the syndrome, thus Tammet is exceptional in that he is able to write about and explain his condition.
Chapter Four: In this chapter I analyse my own embodied experiences of synaesthesia as found in my practical work. This is conducted with reference to the experiences found in the works of Harbisson, Tammet and McCracken discussed in Chapter Three. It sets out the concepts and content of my installation. Being a synaesthete, I find inspiration for my synaesthetic artworks in the counter culture, anti-establishment musicians and artists of the 1960s and 1970s. My reason for locating my research here is that I see artists generally, and synaesthetes in particular, as outsiders or others, who perceive the world in a ‘different’ way to the conventional.

Most synaesthetes explain that they were unaware of their condition until they came to realise that others did not understand their perceptions. Once a synaesthete is aware of their condition they either embrace it or hide it from the world. My circumstances were such that I always embraced it and in doing so, created my synaesthetic artworks.

A key influence in the 1960s was the use of recreational hallucinogenic drug Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), which is known to induce synaesthesia in the user. This multi-sensory stimulation resulted in the 1960s becoming ‘a synaesthete’s dream’. The literature I reference for my artistic practice is Just kids (2010) by Patti Smith in which she explains what it was like living an artistic life in the late 1960s in New York along with her muse, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe.

The Beatles (2009) by Hunter Davies tells the story of one of the greatest bands of all time. Their influences and quirky sense of humour as well as the lyrics in their music stimulates my artistic thought processes.

Rushdie is an author who experiments with words and texts in remarkable ways. He has lived in exile for much of his life and accordingly, many of his texts explore the theme of freedom. His works have often inspired my thought processes and helped me with the realisation of my concepts.

I conclude by reflecting on the outcomes of my study and suggest areas for possible further study.
Chapter Two

Synaesthesia and its contexts

This chapter investigates and contextualises what synaesthesia is and how it manifests itself. The theoretical framework used to investigate the condition of synaesthesia draws from phenomenology as defined by French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) as well as notions of embodiment. According to Sîân Ede in Bacci and Melcher (2011:v):

The experience of actually living in the world is multiply layered. We translate the input from discrete sense organs into a blur of embodied sensation and...we bring or ‘bind’ a range of associations acquired from memory to make sense of the prelinguistic experience.

This statement of the lived bodily experience links closely with what Merleau-Ponty argues in his *Phenomenology of perception* (1962). For Merleau-Ponty (1962:138,139), body and consciousness are closely linked: He says: “consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body”. Which means that we experience the world through more than our senses; our subjective understanding of the world, from our own point of view, allows us to each perceive the world uniquely. Furthering this idea, Merleau-Ponty (1993:8) argues “[w]e are a living bodily system, prior to the body-object that is constructed by science or medicine”.

Although synaesthesia is mostly defined within the fields of medicine and science, a first-hand explanation of what it is like to be a synaesthete, helps the non-synaesthete to understand that synaesthesia is more than a medical term for a cross-sensory condition. It is a way of perceiving and living in the world, experienced through one’s whole body not only one’s eyes or ears.

American contemporary philosopher David Woodruff Smith (2013:sp), who is a specialist on the works of Edmund Husserl, explains:

The term ‘phenomenology’ is often restricted to the characterization of sensory qualities of seeing, hearing etc.: what it is like to have sensations of various kinds. However, our experience is normally much richer in content than mere sensation. Accordingly, in the phenomenological tradition, phenomenology is given a much wider range, addressing the meaning things have in our experience, notably, the significance of objects, events, tools, the flow of time, the self, and others, as these things arise and are experienced in our ‘life-world’.
The synaesthetic experience is a lived, bodily experience, where the synaesthete would not notice their synaesthetic perceptions unless someone or something focuses their attention on it. The synaesthete’s senses intermingle, creating new connections between the senses, allowing for a richer, multi-layered perception of the world.

Researchers such as Richard Cytowic and David Eagleman (2009:21) have noted that “reality is much more subjective than most people suppose. Far from being objectively fixed ‘out there’ in the physical world and passively received by the brain, reality is actively constructed by individual brains that uniquely filter what hits the outside senses”.

Synaesthetes filter this outside world in more complex ways than non-synaesthetes, and although much is still unresolved in the field of synaesthesia, headway has been made in recent years as synaesthesia has become an accepted sub-field of neurology and psychology. Specific connections between phenomenology and synaesthesia are investigated as below in this chapter.

At the end of the 19th century, the term *synaesthesia* was coined by Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), a Victorian polymath and cousin of evolutionist Charles Darwin. Literally, the term means “coloured hearing”. Maureen Seaberg (2011:137) explains that the word comes from the Greek prefix *syn*, meaning “union” and *anaesthesia* meaning “sensation” therefore *synaesthesia* means a union of the senses. Due to synaesthesia’s peculiar nature in that not only does it present in various forms, but also each person who has this condition has their own unique associations which pertain only to them, synaesthesia was believed to be the result of an overactive imagination for hundreds of years.

The 1993 case study of synaesthete Michael Watson, who was referred to by Cytowic as ‘the man who tasted shapes’, was the trigger that launched a renewed interest of scientific research into the field of synaesthesia.

Although Galton coined the term and wrote a paper on synaesthesia, which was entitled *Colour Associations* and which was published in 1883 in the scientific journal *Inquiries into human faculty*, the first recorded reference to the synaesthetic condition is actually found in the iconic essay by English philosopher John Locke, *Concerning human understanding*, which was written in 1690:

> A studious blind man who had mightily beat his head about a visible object, and made use of the explications of his books and friends, to understand those names of light and colours, which often came his way, betrayed one day that he now understood
what scarlet signified. Upon which, his friend demanded what scarlet was? The blind man answered, it was like the sound of a trumpet (in Baron-Cohen & Harrison 1997:4).

Historically, interest in synaesthesia peaked between 1860 and 1930 in Europe, and even underpinned some of the painterly concerns of the German Expressionist group, Der Blaue Reiter (1911 to 1914) as found in their concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art). Interest in synaesthesia began to wane when, in 1924, John B Watson’s book Behaviourism was published. In it Watson (in Seaberg 2011:138) argues that “the subject matter of human psychology is the behaviour of the human being” with Behaviourism further claiming that “consciousness is neither a definite nor a usable concept”. The rise of the notion of behaviourism as a science caused investigations into consciousness and consequently interest in synaesthesia to diminish.

It was not until the late 1980s “when the cognitive revolution in psychiatry peaked” (Seaberg 2011:138) and, due to new ideas and advancements in linguistics, anthropology and psychology as well as new fields of neuroscience, computer science and artificial intelligence (AI), that synaesthesia was, once again, considered an area of interest to the fields of neurology and psychology. Cytowic (in Baron-Cohen and Harrison 1997:20) argues that, until the 1990s, technology was not advanced enough to accurately establish whether synaesthesia was real.

With the advancement of technology and the accumulation of knowledge and expertise in the fields of neuroscience and psychology, particularly with philosopher Daniel Dennett publishing his 1980 thesis which stated “to explain the mind, one needs a theory of content and a theory of consciousness” (Seaberg 2011:138), experts such as Cytowic were able to establish that synaesthesia is not a result of an over-active imagination or a particularly creative mind, but due to a true cross-sensory condition.

Three different types of synaesthete exist:

Firstly the constitutional synaesthete. This is a person who experiences life-long synaesthetic perceptions. Examples of this kind of synaesthete are Melissa McCracken (b. 1990), Daniel Tammet (b. 1979) and me. Secondly, the individual whose synaesthetic experience has been induced by the use of hallucinogenic drugs, specifically LSD; and thirdly, a form of synaesthesia which involves a trauma of some kind, such as a brain tumour or a loss of one sense, rendering synaesthesia suddenly a part of the person’s perception experience (Baron-Cohen & Harrison 1997:150).
The cyborg artist Neil Harbisson (b. 1982), on the other hand, has an altogether different type of synaesthesia, a learned synaesthesia, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

For the purposes of this study, I mainly focus on constitutional synaesthesia particularly grapheme synaesthesia and coloured-hearing synaesthesia.

In an article written on artist Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967), Daniel Barnes (2016:54) comments that Eliasson “is interested in perception as the pure act of the body receiving sensory information from the world; he wants to draw attention to what is seen, but also the act of seeing itself, a process of reflection he calls ‘seeing yourself seeing’”. This is what this chapter attempts to convey: not only what synaesthesia is and how it manifests neurologically, but also how the synaesthete experiences synaesthesia as an embodied phenomenon.

2.1 Synaesthetic perceptions

A useful starting point to explain the synaesthetic experience, is the so-called ‘bouba’ and ‘kiki’ experiment, devised and documented by Edward Hubbard and Vilayanur S. Ramachandran in 2001. People were presented with the following two shapes [Fig. 2.1] and were told: “In Martian language, one of these two figures is called a ‘bouba’ and the other a ‘kiki’, which is which?” Hubbard and Ramachandran (2001:19) established that some 95% of people pick the left as ‘kiki’ and the right as ‘bouba’, even though they have never seen these stimuli before”.

Figure 2.1: Demonstration of the ‘bouba’ ‘kiki’ test (Hubbard & Ramachandran 2001:19).
This experiment indicates that the human mind is capable of forming seemingly arbitrary connections similar to the links used in metaphors. Synaesthesia, it appears, works along the same principles. Adrienne D Chaplin (2005:7) explains:

Different sensations of touch create a variety of different experiences that correspond with subtle nuances of experiences outside the realm of touch. The same dynamic also forms the basis for the use of metaphor, whether in language or in visual imagery. Symbols, whether words, pictures or gestures, used for tactile sensations of physical objects can thus be transferred to the non-physical entities, such as character or mood. In other words, the physical experience, for instance, of warmth or brittleness can evoke an emotional mood so that the name we use for the physical experience can be transferred to other realms of reality, such as persons or moods.

Susanne K Langer (cited in Chaplin 2005:7) states: “Language is born of the need for emotional expression,” and it is meant to “hold the object of feeling,” rather than communicate it. In a similar manner, she argues that synaesthesia “hold(s) the object of feeling” and a synaesthete sees, hears or touches by instantaneously triggering another sense. The feeling can relate to colour, shape or texture to name a few. What the ‘bouba’ and ‘kiki’ test demonstrated is that almost all humans have this ability to link seemingly arbitrary objects, but synaesthetes simply perceive these links on a regular basis.

Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of perception* (1962:x) states:

> My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colours, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately ‘place’ in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams.

This statement can easily be applied to the experiences of a synaesthete, who perceives the world around him/her as it is, but also perceives it as being layered with synaesthetic associations, whether they are colour associations from listening to music, or from seeing letters of the alphabet, tasting shapes or assigning personalities to numbers as Daniel Tammet does. Where non-synaesthetes live in a multiple layered reality, as Merleau-Ponty describes above, synaesthetes experience one or more extra layers of perception, but are still capable of living and perceiving the world as a non-synaesthete does.

In order to understand synaesthetes and their perceptions, one must first familiarise oneself with what synaesthesia is, how it works and the ‘symptoms’ synaesthetes have in common.

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7 Due to my grapheme synaesthesia, I not only associate the word *kiki* with the sharp shape and *bouba* with the round shape, but for me *bouba* is a sky blue colour whilst *kiki* is a bright orangey yellow.
Synaesthesia, as previously discussed, is a union of the senses, where one sense automatically and instantaneously triggers another sense and, in some cases, more than one sense can also be triggered. Autistic savant Tammet, who is discussed in Chapter Three, experiences numerous types of synaesthesia.

Cytowic (1993:sp) explains the process of synaesthesia, using the analogy of a conveyor belt through a factory, where nervous impulses or information flows linearly through the factory, with pieces being added one on top of another until a final product is formed. With the focus on sensation, Cytowic (1993:sp) states:

The first step is for the sense organs to transform from either electromagnetic energy (vision), mechanical energy (hearing and touch), or chemical energy (taste and smell) into nervous impulses. These impulses then travel to different relays in the brainstem and thalamus, and from there to progressively more complex stations of the cortex where different aspects of the external stimulus are sequentially extracted from the stream of nervous impulses. These aspects are somehow assembled at the end of the line into a conscious experience so that we understand what it is in the external world that has triggered our sense organs.

Until recently it was believed that coloured-hearing synaesthesia and grapheme-synaesthesia or coloured-letters synaesthesia were the most common types of synaesthesia. In 2005, professor of neuroscience Julia Simner and her colleagues at Edinburgh University discovered that the most common type of synaesthesia is coloured days of the week. They also found that “synaesthesia is far more common than originally assumed: 1 in 23 for any type of synaesthesia, and 1 in 90 for grapheme-colour synaesthesia” (Cytowic & Eagleman 2009:8).

2.1.1 Relative frequency of different types of synaesthesia

The data for comparative frequencies of different kinds of synaesthesia is based on Sean Day’s tabulation of 738 self-reported cases from a non-random sample (Table 1). In Day’s sample, 72% were female and 28% were male (Cytowic & Eagleman 2009:24).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency (%) of occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphemes → colours</td>
<td>66.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time units → colours</td>
<td>22.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical sounds → colours</td>
<td>18.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General sounds → colours</td>
<td>14.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemes → colours</td>
<td>9.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Musical notes → colours | 9.60  
Smells → colours | 6.80  
Tastes → colours | 6.60  
Sound → tastes | 6.20  
Pain → tastes | 5.80  
Personalities → colours | 5.50  

Table 2.1. A selection from Sean Day’s comparative frequencies of different kinds of synaesthesia. (Data reproduced with permission from http://home.comcast.net/~sean.day/html/types.htm). For the full table, see Appendix A.

Synaesthetic associations, however, only manifest one way. This means that, in the case of grapheme synaesthesia, the synaesthete, for example me, will associate a specific colour with a specific letter of the alphabet. In my case, I associate light blue with the letter B, for example. But when confronted with the light blue colour, I would not immediately think of the letter B.

A key factor in the experience and research of synaesthesia is that the synaesthetic experience is idiosyncratic. This means that no two synaesthetes – even exhibiting the same type of synaesthesia and in the same family – can experience the same associations. Although each grapheme synaesthete has his or her own coloured alphabet, some letters and their coloured associations are more common, such as an A which is often perceived as red.

Such diversity of association formed part of the problem when arguing the cause that synaesthesia is real with sceptics believing that synaesthetes were simply inventing their associations. “They’re just imagining it,” sceptics claimed, writing synaesthetes off as “needy exhibitionists with overactive imaginations who simply want to call attention to themselves” (Cytowic & Eagleman 2009:4-5). The fact that LSD could induce synaesthesia, did not help. Ultimately when the above arguments failed to disprove the experiences of synaesthetes, critics simply dismissed synaesthetes as “crazy artists” (Cytowic & Eagleman 2009:4-5). Cytowic (2002:7) describes the mid- to late 19th century use of the idea of synaesthetic experiences as certain moments which

... sought sensory fusion, and a union of the senses subsequently appeared more and more frequently as an idea. Multimodal concerts of music and light (son et lumière), sometimes including odour, were popular and often featured colour organs, keyboards that controlled coloured lights, as well as musical notes. It is imperative to understand that such deliberate contrivances are qualitatively different from the involuntary experiences of ‘constitutional synaesthesia’.
Where, historically, modernist artists such as Kandinsky and Mark Rothko (1903-1970) are believed to have used the ‘idea’ of synaesthesia, it was never proven whether or not they had synaesthesia themselves.

According to Cytowic and Eagleman (2009:6):

In the case of colored letters and numbers, the brain area crucial for recognizing letter and numeral graphemes is positioned in the left hemisphere just next to the color perception area called V4. Because of increased cross talk, the appearance of a letter triggers activation in the V4 color area. It is interesting that despite having normal color vision, synesthetes commonly say they experience “weird” or “ugly” colors they would not deliberately choose. Even Steven S., a partially color-blind synesthete, speaks of seeing “Martian colors.” Some of his photoreceptors are abnormal, restricting the range of colors he can see, but the color areas in his brain appear to be driven by alternate nonoptical inputs. Cases like this rule out the argument that synesthesia is nothing more than childhood memories, because how could someone remember colors he or she has never seen or is incapable of seeing?

Peter Grossenbacher in his article Perception and sensory information in synaesthetic experience (cited in Baron-Cohen & Harrison 1997:149) writes: “Perception is typically described and understood in terms of sense modalities. The classic concept of sense modality is a tripartite relation between some physical object, a receptor organ”, such as one’s eyes, “and conscious phenomenology (what it is like to see)”. He adds that to these three sense modalities, attention [Baron-Cohen & Harrison 1997:149] should also be added. If the person is not paying attention, then the sense modalities cannot function adequately.

Synaesthetes not only add attention to the ‘normal’ tripartite way of perceiving, but they also add one or more cross-modal senses to the equation. In terms of the three key aspects of perceiving, one has to wonder where the synaesthetic perception would place itself. Is it in all three or as an added extra to the way of perceiving? These questions are yet to be answered successfully. An important aspect to note concerning attention, when perceiving the world on a daily basis, is that even a synaesthete would not always be aware of his or her own synaesthesia. A synaesthete could easily go about his or her daily life without consciously experiencing synaesthetic associations, until something draws his or her attention to it and he or she is compelled to consider it.

After all, as Jonathan Cole (2002:xii) says:

walking direction, body image, sound localization, and tactile perception are just some of the multisensory interactions we perceive. All reflect the need to build up the most comprehensive view of the world and our internal and external space. Though
different sensory modalities may appear pure, they interact at a level before consciousness in a variety of ways in normal circumstances.

Synaesthetes are, as a whole, very particular about their perceptions. One of Cytowic’s case studies, a subject known as ‘DS’, explains: “Seeing sound/music does not adequately describe the process. There is a spatial presence that incorporates more than just the sensation of ‘seeing’. I think that a better description is perceiving, which also includes the sensation of feeling and denotes integration” (Cytowic 2002:33).

Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin in *Art and embodiment: Biological and phenomenological contributions to understanding beauty and the aesthetic* (2005:8) explains

> perception is not a question of deliberately taking up a position or engaging in a particular act, but a holistic and integrated pre-reflective experience. It is “the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them.” We never merely perceive isolated sense-impressions which are then formed into mental representations or ideas. We can not even perceive such atomic, isolated sensations because we can only see things as “figures” against a “ground” and in relation to other “figures”. This ground is part of our embodied experience, prior to any mental representations. It is the horizon which consists of our previous experiences and future expectations.

As a synaesthete, I perceive the world around me differently to how non-synaesthetes perceive things. My coloured-perceptions are internal, rather than projections. This means that when I read I do not physically ‘see’ the colour on top of each letter. The letters remain black on white, but if I were to pay particular attention to a specific letter, my internal feeling\(^8\) would be a certain colour. An example can be the letter *R* which, for me, is a dark mossy-forestry green.

Cytowic (2002:2) explains: “synesthetic percepts are neither a conventional perception nor an image. They possess a curious spatial extension and dynamism, and are involuntary, automatic and consistent over time”.

An interesting factor of synaesthesia is the prevalence of colour. Though seen through the eyes, seeing colour is not a sense in itself. Rather it is a result of light. Why then is colour the

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\(^8\) In terms of what the colour-feeling looks like, it’s transparent, a bit like smoke, extending in my mind’s eye over a large rectangular surface. Being a visual artist, I often use coloured glass to convey this feeling, as the use of real smoke would make the colours too opaque. My colours are transparent, vibrant and a little smoky but with a stained glass quality about them. When I think of peppermint, for instance, the smell and taste convey a bright fresh green which is smooth and cool and circular in shape. Considering that my favourite colours are the blues and greens in the colour spectrum, and my least favourite colours are shades of brown, I do have an alphabet which is in the majority brown, yellow and red, and which features very little green and blue. This is a further indication that synaesthetes do not consciously pick their colours.
most common concurrent in synaesthesia? A possible explanation for this is that, according to Grossenbacher (1997:155):

> Colour is the only dimension of vision which is not shared by any other sense modality, so it may be the one sort of visual information processed by the brain which is not normally tethered to other senses … The very lack of universal correspondence between colour and other modalities may make colour phenomena readily available for concurrent synaesthetic experience.

Several theories on synaesthesia still remain unresolved today. One is that of synaesthesia and language and whether there is a link between language development and synaesthetic associations. Due to synaesthesia’s prevalence in childhood, researchers including Cytowic, Eagleman, Hubbard and Ramachandran theorise that this is an indication that cross-sensory links are needed to develop a child’s understanding of the world as well as their language skills. Whilst it is a popular theory, it is yet to be conclusively proven.

Synaesthesia and metaphor go hand in hand. It is a “reccurent criticism of skeptics that synesthetes are simply speaking metaphorically, the way someone might speak of a ‘loud tie’” (Cytowic 2009:7).

Cytowic (2009:7) goes on to argue that the reason synesthetes are seen to speak metaphorically is perhaps because metaphors were originally constructed by synesthetes:

> But think a minute—is not a tie visual instead of auditory? And why do people use a taste adjective to describe a person, as in “she’s so sweet?” What is going on with terms like “sharp cheese” and “cool jazz”? There is a circular logic in saying synesthetes are just being metaphoric because we do not yet understand how metaphor is represented in the brain. Rather, the argument should perhaps go the other way around: perhaps common metaphors stem from synesthesia. Our hope is that understanding the concrete sensory phenomenon of synesthesia will give us a handle on the neurological basis of metaphor and even artistic creativity.

For synaesthetes, speaking metaphorically is never the intention. We simply say what we perceive to be real: a brown Tuesday or a particularly sunshine-yellow song is part of our reality. Sometimes these perceptions strike a chord with non-synaesthetes as something particularly apt, rather than being seen as something strange or odd to say; the word combination is then used by non-synaesthetes as part of their daily vocabulary. Whether this is how metaphors were invented or even where the majority of metaphors come from, is yet to be established, however, metaphor helps concretise the embodied experiences of synaesthetes using linguistic modalities with which non-synaesthetes can identify.
The reason why progress on what synaesthesia is and where it comes from is so slow is because it is a relatively new field of research; one of its main problems being diversity of synaesthetic associations. Many synaesthetes do not realise they have crossed-senses, since the combinations are so varied. Unless you mention your synaesthetic association to a non-synaesthete and they, in turn, tell you that it is not ‘normal’, you would never conceive of the idea that what you are experiencing is any different from the person next to you.

The next problem the researcher faces is that so many synaesthetes keep their synaesthesia secret, either because they believe it to be normal, or because they have been told that it is odd or not normal and therefore they keep their experiences hidden so as not to be labelled a ‘freak’. Once a person is established to have synaesthesia, there then arrives a myriad of problems involving how many cross-sensory associations they have and what combinations the synaesthesia takes, not to mention that each synaesthete’s synaesthesia is unique and personalised. All of these factors result in a ‘condition’ which is particularly difficult to pin point.

Researchers in the field of synaesthesia have started testing synaesthetes by the type of synaesthesia they may have, for instance, colour-linguistic synaesthetes or touch-taste synaesthetes. Categorising synaesthetes helps to test a certain type to see what commonalities and differences there are within the specific group type.9 Romke Rouw and Steven Scholte (2010) (in Rogowska 2015:2) explain:

> Distinct neural mechanisms depend on the type of synaesthesia. Projector synaesthetes’ experience is related to brain areas involved in perceiving and acting in the outside world...as well as frontal brain areas, whereas associator synaesthetes’ experience is related to the hippocampus and parahippocapal gyrus, known for their role in memory.

Aleksandra Maria Rogowska’s book *Synaesthesia and Individual Differences* (2015) is focused exclusively on linguistic-colour synaesthetes. By testing both non-synaesthetes and linguistic-colour synaesthetes, Rogowska was able to determine what, if anything, the synaesthetes have in common. She (2015:153) found that: “Linguistic-colour synaesthetes outperformed non-synaesthetes in attention, absorption, imagination and memory. They also revealed heightened excitation, negative emotionality (especially in anger), heightened extraversion and activity as compared to non-synaesthetes”.

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9 See Figure 1 or the complete list of types of synaesthesia in Appendix A.
In order to better explain what she means by absorption and what it is she is testing, Rogowska (2015:108) offers this definition:

According to [American psychologists Auke] Tellegen and [Gilbert] Atkinson (1974), absorption is openness to absorbing and self-altering experiences, and it is understood as disposition to situations in which a person’s total attention fully engages his or her representational resources: perceptual, enactive, imaginative and ideational. As a state, absorption occurs when a limited number of typically coordinated or related stimuli are focused on the attentional exclusion of other stimuli (external or internal), due to the unifying or aggregative manifestation of cognitive awareness.

She (2015:109) adds:

Although synaesthetes scored higher in absorption than non-synaesthetes, the positive result of correlation and regression analysis suggests that stronger linguistic-colour synaesthetes demonstrated lower absorption. Trait absorption reflects individual differences in cognitive capacity for involvement in sensory and imaginative experiences, in ways that alter an individual’s perception, memory and mood. As such, weaker linguistic colour synaesthetes may be described as emotionally responsive to engagement. Absorption with sights and sounds, being readily captured by entrancing stimuli, and thinking in images.

Categories in synaesthesia are important in various instances, not only by testing synaesthetes per category as Rogowska does, but also the categories that form in the synaesthete’s mind. Cytowic (2002:49) explains:

I have until now under-appreciated the role of categories in synaesthesia. For example, synaesthesia’s most common manifestation, colored letters and numbers, is based [on] category. Chromatic-graphememic synaesthetes will see A as the same color whether uppercase, lowercase, cursive, italic, or whatever because they recognize it as an instantiation of their prototypical category “A”. Here, synaesthesia depends on the ability to categorize shape, not just perceive it as an object.

By conducting these synaesthetic-specific tests, one is able to draw some links between synaesthetes and better understand the mechanisms that make up a synaesthete’s perceptions.

2.2 The synaesthete as other

Many synaesthetes tell a similar story: the classic tale of the synaesthete who believed that everyone experienced synaesthesia and that it was a normal way of perceiving and living in the world. This synaesthete would then one day communicate to a non-synaesthete that Fridays are a lovely magenta colour, for instance. The non-synaesthete would not know what the synaesthete is talking about and the synaesthete would then realise what they believed to be a normal way of experiencing the world was, in fact, abnormal.
“All apologize frequently. ‘I know this sounds crazy, but... ’” They also learned to stop talking about their green symphonies, salty visions and tastes that feel like glass columns long ago in childhood when they realized that they were different, and that no one else understood”, writes Cytowic (2002:15). Many synaesthetes, as a result of being perceived as abnormal, decide to keep their synaesthetic perceptions to themselves, in order to better fit in and not be ridiculed.

Due to this feeling of outsiderness in synaesthetes, the ‘other’ becomes an important theme when dealing with not only synaesthetes, but with the synaesthetic artist. Cytowic (2002:19) argues that “true synaesthetes are reticent; weirdos and wannabes will talk about their ‘visions’ at the drop of a hat” with synaesthetes almost always keeping their experiences to themselves. In my experience, not only do synaesthetes not want to be seen as ‘other’ by their peers, but many have never heard of synaesthesia and are prone to believe that they might be abnormal. As previously discussed in this chapter, synaesthesia is consistent and the triggers happen automatically. The synaesthete experiences these synaesthetic perceptions as real and unavoidable. When you have a mild form of synaesthesia, you might be able to ignore it, but the more intense the type of synaesthesia the more inclined the synaesthete is to believe they are mentally unstable. Once they find out that what they have is not something to worry about and that others have the same experiences, they express their relief.

One of Cytowic’s subjects in Synaesthesia: a union of the senses (2002:18) explains how she felt when she found out there is a name for her condition:

It’s an affirmation that I am not nuts and whatever my other problems may have been, being crazy was not one of them. I am a sight/sound synaesthete, most often seeing sounds as colours, with a certain sense of almost pressure on exposed skin when sounds are very light or colours very bright. It’s definitely colours, but I’m not sure that “seeing” is the most accurate description. I am seeing, but not with my eyes, if that makes sense. I love my colours, can not imagine being without them. One of the things I love about my husband are the colours of his voice and his laugh. It’s a wonderful golden brown, with a flavour of crisp, buttery toast, which sounds very odd, I know, but it is very real.

The synaesthete’s fear of outsiderness is not unfounded. Cytowic (2002:295) states:

Almost all synaesthetes have suffered ridicule or derision because of their parallel senses. As children, they were accused of overactive imaginations, taunted by their classmates, and sometimes doubted by their own parents. Unlike the stresses of expectation that befall child prodigies, foreigners in a strange culture, or the sickly child, synaesthetes shoulder those of the freak.
Some synaesthetes, like me, are lucky to have grown up in an environment where their friends and family are also synaesthetes. This affords them the freedom to express their perceived associations and discuss them freely amongst each other.\textsuperscript{10}

Perhaps the ‘other’ is a normal part of human life, as English mathematician Isaac Newton (1643-1747) explained: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. In a similar way Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1991:sp) argues: “Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend”.

These ideas argue for othering as normative whilst the synaesthete’s experience can certainly never be argued as such. As French existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir states in \textit{The Second Sex} (1989:[Sp]):

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being … She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.

If, with a degree provocation, I argue that we replace woman with \textit{synaesthete} and man with \textit{non-synaesthete}, the same would still be true. The non-synaesthete is the Subject, [he] is the Absolute – [she] the synaesthete is the Other.

Minority groups will almost always be seen as others, as is the case with synaesthetes. Our behaviour and self-image is based on how the majority of the world sees us and how we would like to interact with the world. As one engages with the world and inevitably with individuals and groups of people, similarities and differences play a central role in nurturing a feeling of belonging. This applies to all groups. Interestingly, if you are a synaesthete, you will belong to the social group of the synaesthete, which then renders the idea of the non-synaesthete as the other to you. The majority of people will still see synaesthetes or artists as

\textsuperscript{10} In my immediate family, my mother, my brother and I all have grapheme synaesthesia. Only my father does not have synaesthesia. During my childhood, I would often instigate a “game” or discussion in which I would mention what colour my letters or days of the week or even the names of my family members are. My mother and brother would immediately disagree with my colours, stating that their alphabet is completely different. When we would then turn to my father to find out which colours he believes to be correct, he would not have a clue what we were talking about. We found this strange and frustrating. I am even more fortunate than most in that many of my friends that I have had had since childhood also have synaesthesia. Another interesting thing is that even my mother’s sister understands us, since she also has a type of synaesthesia, although it is not grapheme, but rather she places numbers in three-dimensional space.
others, but to those groups, the non-synaesthete and the non-creative are the other (Zevallos 2011:[Sp]).

In my own artwork, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Four, I use my synaesthetic alphabet of colour to encode messages which the viewer has to decode in order to fully understand the concept of my work. As I am a grapheme synaesthete, the non-synaesthete is seen as other by me. In one of my previous works entitled Reading colour (2009), I purposefully alienated the viewer. The work was presented in such a way that the review was granted the opportunity to read from my artist’s book, knowing that the words are encoded in my synaesthetic alphabet, and so would be unreadable to anyone but me. Reading colour deals with the idea of freedom of expression and what it is like when that freedom is taken away. In Chapter Four I explain how the idea of othering as well as freedoms come into play in my creative process.

2.3 Phenomenology and synaesthesia

Merleau-Ponty (1994:124) argues that in living in the world, we perceive everything around us, and we make cross-sensory connections in order to live in and understand the world around us even before conscious thought takes place. The body and the senses act together without the mind consciously thinking about what it is doing. We do not need to think to be able to breathe. He (1994:124) explains further:

The enigma derives from the fact that my body, simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the “other side” of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing: it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. It is a self, not by transparency; like thought, which never thinks anything except by assimilating it, constituting it, transforming it into thought – but a self by confusion, narcissism, inherence of the see-er in the seen, the toucher in the touched, the feeler in the felt – a self, then, that is caught up in things, having a front and a back, a past and a future.

This image aptly describes the synaesthetic experience. The connection is made without conscious thought, the colours might become stronger once we pay attention, but they are nevertheless always present. The actual experience of synaesthesia is very hard to put into words as Cytowic (2002:19) explains: “I have trouble putting into words some of the things I experience. It is like explaining red to a blind person or Middle C to a deaf person.” One has to think very clearly about a specific trigger and what that trigger causes. For me the feeling
of green-ness for the letter Y, for instance, is crisp and clean like sunshine through a rose leaf. But what shape it takes, I honestly can not say.

Carolyne Quinn (2009:9) explains that Merleau-Ponty in “arguing perception to be an expressive and creative instance, also maintains that it is intimately linked with artistic practice”. This is important to my project, and is further corroborated by Quinn (2009:9) as follows: “While perception is the origin of both the act of making art and its end-product, ‘amplification’ denotes the specific; important changes that occur in the ‘translation’ and ‘extension’ of perception into the physical process of art-making”.

For synaesthetes this ‘translation’ and ‘extension’ means not only looking at the world around them and translating the colours, shapes and shadows onto a painted surface but it could mean listening to music and concentrating on the colours in the mind’s eye as the shapes take form in front of them. The shapes and colours under these circumstances are visible only to the synaesthete and it is up to that person to translate what they perceive to be a real and lived experience, as accurately as they possibly can.

Merleau-Ponty expands on the idea of what is real to me and what is real to you. For Merleau-Ponty (1994:126) a visual artist, by observing the world and portraying their perception of the world through whichever medium suits them best, “gives vision that which clothes it within, the imaginary texture of the real”. What the artist and synaesthete perceive is real to them and true to how they perceive the world, but no two synaesthetes experience the same synaesthetic perceptions, just as no two artists create the same artwork even when working with the same medium and subject matter. Merleau-Ponty (1994:126) justifies this point with a quote from Italian sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966): “What interests me in all paintings is likeness – that is, what likeness is for me: something that makes me uncover the external world a little.” For a non-synaesthete that is what the synaesthetic artist presents them with, a glimpse into the world of a synaesthete.

Merleau-Ponty uses the terms primary and secondary expression in his Phenomenology of perception (1962). For him, the term expression relates to all forms of expression including art and language. Quinn (2009:12-13) explains the distinction between secondary and primary expression as defined by Merleau-Ponty:

A secondary expression is an instance where we articulate the world in terms of perceptions or concepts which are routine and familiar to us. In contrast, a primary expression is an instance where we take up an unorthodox or innovative position in
relation to the world, when we express it in a new way, as does the poet in his or her transformation of language, or indeed any artist.

The synaesthete, like the artist, takes up primary expression. Due to the idiosyncratic nature of synaesthesia, even if a non-synaesthete or indeed a synaesthete was aware of synaesthesia, he or she would not be aware of that particular synaesthete’s associations. With so little known about synaesthesia, including why it occurs and what its purpose might be, a pertinent question is, of what use primary synaesthetic expression might be? This question relates to the artist as well, including French post-impressionist painter Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) who Merleau-Ponty admired.

According to Quinn (2009:14-15) Cézanne “was plagued by incertitude as to whether what he had expressed would become meaningful for others…” And the same can be expected from the synaesthete and the synaesthetic artist. Merleau-Ponty, Johnson and Smith (1993:69) say: “the artist launches his work just as a man once launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a shout”.

Quinn (2009:14-15) quoting Merleau-Ponty explains that:

What the artist expresses will not be clearly articulated thought, “since such clear thoughts are those that have already been said within ourselves or by others.” An artist’s work gains meaning and resonance from the intersubjective world in which the artist is situated and not solely by his or her expressing something.

Merleau-Ponty et al. (1993:70) add; “The painter can do no more than construct an image; he must wait for this image to come to life for other people. When it does, the work of art will have united these separate lives; it will no longer exist in one of them like a stubborn dream … It will dwell undivided in several minds”.

The artist and synaesthete’s work is “a process of expression”; the synaesthetic artist “recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things” (Merleau-Ponty et al. 1993:67-8). Expressing the synaesthetic perceptions allows viewers to acknowledge that such a condition exists and teaches more about the condition. Due to the cross-sensory nature of synaesthesia, synaesthetes’ perceptions are particularly rich and all-encompassing.

The colour-synaesthete does not choose the colours he or she experiences, rather the colours simply appear, unasked for. Since each synaesthete experiences different colour percepts, it could be argued that although he or she does not choose the colours, the colours do not
choose him or her either. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty (1968:123) explains about perception: “…a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we may say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things”. This describes the synaesthete’s experience: the colours pass into us as we pass into the colours.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the synaesthete’s perception is often described as seeing: seeing colours or shapes which have been triggered by one’s eyes or ears, for example. The reality is that although it is called ‘seeing’, it is a much more all-encompassing, “bodily affair” (Chaplin 2005:5). What Eliasson (2016:54) calls “seeing yourself seeing”, the synaesthete is aware that what they are “seeing themselves seeing” is their synaesthetic perception and that it is invisible to those around them. It is not necessarily based on the sense of sight, but rather on “alternate non-optical inputs”, as mentioned by Cytowic and Eagleman (2009:6), and it is nonetheless a real perception for the synaesthete. One sense triggers another with such authority and immediacy that it is not always perceptible to the synaesthete. As noted by Chaplin (2005:8): “We can not even perceive such atomic, isolated sensations because we can only see things as ‘figures’ against a ‘ground’ and in relation to other ‘figures’. This ground is part of our embodied experience”. When the synaesthete, therefore, mentions ‘seeing’ colours and shapes, what they are in reality referring to might not be construed as ‘seeing’ at all, but rather a way of perceiving with their entire body participating in the perception.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1964:50): “I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once”. Merleau-Ponty thus believes that an ‘ordinary’ human being perceives with all their senses at once. A synaesthete not only perceives with all their senses at once but also with their senses triggering other arbitrary perceptions.

Quinn (2009:17) argues that “[t]he artist is the person who brings primary expressions into being” The synaesthetic artist attempts to open the eyes of the non-synaesthete to encourage the viewer away “from the already constituted reason in which ‘cultured men’ are content to shut themselves” (Merleau-Ponty 1994:69).
Any person going about their daily lives is not supposed to see floating coloured shapes when there are not any, however, the artist creates art in order for the rest of the world to understand their unique point of view. Diane Fremont (2009:3-4) expands on this:

As the artist engages with the elusive ‘other’ in the creative process, moving back and forth between the visible and the invisible, little by little, each brings the other to life, finally manifesting in that numinous ‘third’ that is born into and lives in the secret space of the image itself. Once this quality has been captured alive in the work of art, it resides there secretly available to the viewer willing to be led into its initiatory space.

In Chapter Three I introduce three synaesthetic artists: Melissa McCracken, a grapheme and coloured-hearing synaesthete; Daniel Tammet an autistic savant, who experiences various different types of synaesthesia; and cyborg artist Neil Harbisson, who uses an antenna implanted in his brain to induce synaesthesia. Each of these artists could be seen as an ‘other’. In order to better understand their artworks it becomes pertinent to understand their backgrounds as well.

Since synaesthesia is such a personal experience, with no two synaesthetes experiencing the same synaesthetic perceptions, understanding each synaesthetic artist’s type of synaesthesia as well as their particular perceptions is vital, in order to understand their art. Each of the three artist’s works not only differs in terms of medium and content, but also with regards to their type of synaesthesia. I use McCracken as an entry point, as her abstract ‘landscape’ paintings depict the shapes and colours she perceives while listening to music, arguably the most easily understandable synaesthetic art of the three.

Tammet’s synaesthesia is much more complex than the majority of synaesthetes with his relationship to numbers being uniquely intricate. His autism and consequently his savant syndrome, add to the layers of meaning in his synaesthetic photographs.

Lastly I analyse the works of Harbisson. He was born colour blind and without synaesthesia; and to this day, still sees the world in grey scale. His synaesthesia is induced by means of an antenna implanted in his brain. Each of these artists experience the embodied perceptions of a synaesthete.
Chapter Three

Exploring the manifestations of synaesthesia in the works of selected contemporary synaesthetic artists

The terms *phenomenology* and *embodiment* as defined by French phenomenological philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), focus on the influences of the ‘outside’ or visible world on our senses and, in turn, influence our perception of the world. David Woodruff Smith (2013:sp) quoting Merleau-Ponty explains that “In short, consciousness is embodied (in the world), and equally, body is infused with consciousness (with cognition of the world)”.

The way in which people perceive the world is instantaneous: when someone or something touches the skin of an individual, they feel it immediately. Reflexes such as breathing or blinking are often performed without conscious thought with all of these actions occurring constantly; this is the lived, embodied experience. Synaesthetes are able to move beyond this by automatically linking one or more of the senses, creating ‘cross-wiring’ in the brain.

Synaesthetic engagement with the world is constant, does not change over time, and is embodied. An A for me is always red, it never changes, it does not depend on pronunciation and it does not matter how it’s written. An A is simply, in my mind, categorised as red.

Where synaesthesia differs from the phenomenological and embodied experiences of non-synaesthetes, is that non-synaesthetes do not experience the same connections between the senses. For example, to non-synaesthetes, an A is just an A. Synaesthesia becomes even more complicated if one considers that each synaesthete not only has their own type of synaesthesia, such as grapheme or colour-hearing, but that each synaesthete has their own personal associations within each type of synaesthesia. My A is red, but that does not mean that all grapheme synaesthetes experience an A as red. Some might categorise the A as mauve or white, for instance.

Synaesthetes, by describing their associations and creating artworks of their specific synaesthesia, are arguably trying to make the invisible visible.11

In the previous chapter I introduced and contextualised different types of synaesthesia and in this chapter, I focus on three contemporary artists: American-born Melissa McCracken (b.

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11 Where normally I would place *visible* and *invisible* in single quotation marks, I purposefully have removed these from this text in order to help normalise the synaesthetic phenomenon and experience.
1990), Daniel Tammet from England (b. 1979) and Catalan artist Neil Harbisson (b. 1982). All three artists use their personal types of synaesthesia as inspiration for their artworks. I have elected to write about these artists in particular because little has, to date, been written about them by critics or academics,\textsuperscript{12} which means that effectively, there is a gap in the literature which I hope to help fill.

According to Jonathan Cole quoted in Richard Cytowic’s \textit{Synaesthesia: A Union of the Senses} (2002:xii), an explanation from synaesthetes is crucial, stating: “In such a condition, which is internal, symptomatic, and without external sign, the narratives of individuals are hugely important”. These narratives are unpacked and contextualised in relation to specific work by the three selected artists upon which I have elected to focus.

McCracken employs her coloured-hearing synaesthesia to translate music, mostly Rock and Pop songs, into oil or acrylic paintings on canvas. As an access point to the world of the synaesthetic artist, McCracken’s literal translation of her embodied synaesthetic experience forms an ideal entry point for those unfamiliar with the process of artmaking for the synaesthetic artist.

Unlike McCracken, Tammet, who is an autistic savant,\textsuperscript{13} uses his unique multi-synaesthetic expression relating to numbers, to create photographic representations in collaboration with French photographer Jérôme Tabet (b. 1980). Tammet’s synaesthesia is more complicated and elaborate than that of the majority of synaesthetes. He not only associates colours with numbers, letters and words, but also attributes a personality, texture and size to each number. Tammet (2006:1) explains some of his synaesthetic associations:

\begin{quote}
I was born on January 31, 1979 – a Wednesday. I know it was a Wednesday, because the date is blue in my mind and Wednesdays are always blue, like the number 9 or the sound of loud voices arguing. I like my birth date, because of the way I’m able to visualize most of the numbers in it as smooth and round shapes, similar to pebbles on a beach. That’s because they are prime numbers … I can recognise every prime up to 9,973 by their “pebble-like” quality.
\end{quote}

Harbisson was not born with synaesthesia, but in 2004 had an antenna permanently implanted in his brain to create antenna-induced-synaesthesia. Born colour-blind, he uses his antenna to translate colour into sound vibrations. By analysing these vibrations he connects each sound

\textsuperscript{12} The little that has been written about these artists has been written by the artists themselves.

\textsuperscript{13} Savant syndrome is a rare, but extraordinary, condition in which persons with serious mental disabilities, including autistic disorder, have some ‘island of genius’ which stands in marked, incongruous contrast to the overall handicap (Treffert 2009:sp).
to a colour and is then able to create synaesthetically-induced artworks using coloured-hearing synaesthesia.

In order to unpack the selected synaesthetic artworks, I deploy a critical framework of phenomenology and embodiment in which to analyse and unpack the synaesthetic terminology in each of my selected artist’s works. In this chapter, I contemplate several questions relating to these artists and their working methods. Since all synaesthetes have different associations; for instance, not every synaesthete associates the letter *I* with pink, how would a synaesthete with a different set of associations, or a different type of synaesthesia respond or relate to the artworks? Would there be an overlapping of associations between the types of synaesthesia or an opposite reaction, where the colours used trigger a ‘wrong’ association in the mind of the viewer or would there simply be no embodied experience or association at all? In order to answer this question and due to the lack of available research on my subjects, I insert myself into the study as a grapheme synaesthete in the form of a set of responses\(^\text{14}\) to the selected artworks of my chosen synaesthetic artists.

### 3.1 The synaesthetic landscapes of Melissa McCracken

As discussed in Chapter Two, the need for humans to create art appears to be a crucial part of the human condition. Adrienne D Chaplin (2005:sp) argues that “[a]rt is not merely a symptom of human need, but a symbolic articulation of our embodied experience and understanding of the world.” If we take what she claims to be true, then it is only natural that the synaesthetic experience induces the need to create art, in order to explain the synaesthete’s perception of the world.

McCracken (2016a) explains that she started to paint the music she ‘sees’ because she wished to better be able to explain her experiences of synaesthesia to the world. She feels that through painting the shapes and colours of the music she heard, she could illustrate what she sees/feels\(^\text{15}\) rather than trying to explain it in words.

Ian McDonald (in Baron-Cohen & Harrison1997:iix) writes: “An outstanding feature of synaesthesia is its pervasiveness in the mental life of those who have it. Equally characteristic

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\(^\text{14}\) Due to the minimal sources available on my selected artists and my own grapheme synaesthesia experiences, I conduct a comparative study in which my own synaesthesia is used as a point of comparison as well as analysis of the synaesthetic artworks of my selected artists. These are found in the footnotes.

\(^\text{15}\) The textual conjoining of terms such as sees/feels is a purposeful sign of the synaesthete’s cross-wiring and multiple sensory experiences.
is the synaesthete’s lack of curiosity about such a familiar integral part of experience until some event draws attention to its exceptional nature”. For McCracken, this realisation came when she was 15 years old.

She explains (McCracken 2016a): “... until I was 15, I thought everyone constantly saw colors. Colors in books, colors in math formulas, colors at concerts. But when I finally asked my brother which color the letter C was (canary yellow, by the way) I realized my mind was not quite as normal as I had thought.” This is a typical experience of the synaesthete’s life. Synaesthetes like McCracken and I always believed that what we experience and perceive is the same as everyone else’s experience. While McCracken only realised her perceptions were peculiar at the age of 15, others16 come to realise they are ‘other’ much sooner in life and, because they do not wish to stand out from their peers, they hide it from the world.

McCracken (2016a) goes on to explain her types of synaesthesia:

Basically, my brain is cross-wired. I experience the ‘wrong’ sensation to certain stimuli. Each letter and number is colored and the days of the year circle around my body as if they had a set point in space. But the most wonderful ‘brain malfunction’ of all is seeing the music I hear. It flows in a mixture of hues, textures and movements, shifting as if it were a vital and intentional element of each song. Having synesthesia is not distracting or disorienting. It adds a unique vibrance to the world I experience.

This is the second commonality found amongst most synaesthetes: despite what must be considered as strange or arbitrary associations to mundane things, such as numbers and letters, synaesthetes consider their cross associations as beneficial to their daily lives. In fact, according to Richard Cytowic (2002:46) many have expressed the concern that should their synaesthesia disappear, it would leave a hole in their sensibilities akin to losing a sense.

When McCracken listens to music she sees coloured landscapes forming in her mind and whilst listening to the music, she paints what she perceives to be real. She (2016a) explains that when she was younger, her brother would play songs for her in his room. While listening to these songs, she would see colours and shapes forming around her to such an extent that, looking back at those memories, she can not see her brother, but only the coloured symphonies. When she realised that what she experiences when listening to music is not  

16 For synaesthetic first-hand descriptions see Chapter Two of Richard Cytowic’s Synesthesia: A Union of the Senses, 2002.
normal, she started to paint her favourite songs in the form of landscape equivalents, in order for others to better understand what she experiences.

Figure 3.2: Melissa McCracken, *Imagine*, 2015, Acrylic on canvas, 508x609mm, Melissa McCracken website, 2016.

For the purposes of this study I chose her work *Imagine*, which is the coloured landscape equivalent of John Lennon’s famous eponymous song, which was released in 1971.

I chose to look at this work in greater depth for two reasons: Firstly, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, I am constantly inspired by the anti-establishment, counterculture artists and musicians of the 1960s and 1970s. John Lennon (1940-1980), is a particular favourite of mine and almost always features in my own work and I am an avid listener to the work of Lennon and the Beatles, with which he was associated. The second reason pertains to my own synaesthetic associations, that of grapheme synaesthesia. For a
viewer to engage meaningfully with McCracken’s *Imagine* they must place themselves in the mind of a synaesthetic artist. The work either makes sense to the viewer or it does not. ¹⁷

In order for McCracken to create her artworks, she must first listen to the music of the song. The notes, the instruments and melody trigger the forms and colours she perceives. McCracken (2016a) explains that when she imagines her mind as a blank space, she imagines it as “a sort of navy blue,” which forms the base colour on her canvas. On top of this colour she will then start to layer the rest of the song. “A golden explosion for an electric guitar or a

¹⁷ My synaesthetic associations correlate very closely to McCracken’s sound-landscape.

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![Figure 3.3: Ilka van Schalkwyk, 2016, *Imagine*. Digital artwork, 210x297mm](image)

My coloured-letter associations to the lyrics of *Imagine* are very similar to McCracken’s coloured response to the music of the song. This explains why this particular artwork evokes a feeling of rightness in me. Notwithstanding the fact that each synaesthete experiences the world differently, as an avid Lennon/Beatles listener, I would feel a sense of wrongness and discomfort if the artwork of *Imagine* did not correlate with my embodied experience of how the song ought to be portrayed.
mush of different colours dripping down the side for a piano chord or an iridescent quality if it’s jazz music”.18

Chaplin (2005:[Sp]) in her interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of perception (1962) explains that:

…works of art or music cannot be separated from what they express. In a picture, “the idea is incommunicable by means other than the display of colors and in a piece of music. The musical meaning of a sonata is inseparable from the sounds which are its vehicle.” There is no “idea” behind the work of art. The painter thinks with his brush and paints. A paintbrush or musical instrument functions like a walking stick for a blind person, that is, as a “bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis”.

For synaesthetes, the same reasoning can be applied. There is no thinking of $B$ as light blue, but rather an instantaneous correlation that $B$ is light blue and will always be light blue.

McCracken’s colours, shapes and textures are not something she thinks about: she hears the music and the colours appear and such experiences are constant and do not change.

McCracken (2016a) explains that, for her, the most beautiful and crucial part of Imagine is the piano chords, which she represents by layering different colours in a dripping effect on the right hand side of the painting. The melody of the piano flows from the right hand side of the painting in layers of textured colours, seemingly moving further and further away, into a different imagined world. For her (McCracken 2016a), the song with its melody and words has an “ethereal and heavenly quality about it”, which is where the billowy white top layers of paint come into play.

The textured, layered colours then return to the foreground, becoming larger and darker and smoother. In the bottom left corner of the painting, the navy blue of McCracken’s ‘blank mind’ remains visible.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the external, or that which is visible, influences the viewer and creates associations and ideas or, as he put it, the invisible. Anna Rowland (2012:14) explains Merleau-Ponty’s argument:

From the phenomenological point of view, it is “the interaction of external conditions and internal construction that forms the basis for human creation, response, and apprehension”. Based on this discussion, Merleau-Ponty established the notions “visible” and “invisible”, suggesting that the visible is the external phenomenon and the invisible is what is created inside the beholder by means of their imagination and perception. Therefore, every visible phenomenon has its own invisible facet.

18 McCracken explains her experience of synaesthesia in her 2016 YouTube video available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDzvPmAap8M
In a synaesthete’s mind, this process is more complicated. Like any other person, a synaesthete makes sense of the world through perceiving it and making associations based on those perceptions, but where a synaesthete’s perceptions of the world differs, is in their cross-sensory experiences. Where synaesthesia is concerned, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of visible and invisible can almost be flipped on its head.

What the grapheme- or coloured-hearing synaesthetic artist tries to communicate is the visible associations that only they can perceive. It might be stimulated, in McCracken’s case, by music, but the music and the synaesthetic associations are intrinsically linked and visible. The one triggers the other involuntarily; rather than listening to music and thinking of an imagined world or the piano, or guitar, a synaesthete would have an automatic trigger which simply kicks in when the music starts, no conscious thoughts are necessary.

What McCracken and indeed all synaesthetic artists are trying to achieve is to make their visible perceptions of what is, for a non-synaesthete invisible, into a tangible simulation of the experiences of synaesthetes. The intention of the artist and artwork is to allow non-synaesthetes to have a better understanding of the synaesthete’s experience.

3.2 Daniel Tammet: The numerical portraits of an autistic savant

When Daniel Tammet was born in 1979, autism was not considered a recognised, neurological condition. Although his parents had struggled to deal with an “overly sensitive child”, Tammet (2006) never thought of himself as strange. He can remember spending hours at nursery school, fascinated by the texture of sand running through his fingers, or the different textures of the nursery school floor, where he walked. Other people simply did not feature in his life.

Later, Tammet would be diagnosed as having Asperger’s Syndrome, which is a higher functioning type of autism, and savant syndrome as well as multiple types of synaesthesia. Cytowic (2002:46) explains:

> Synesthesia is a rich way of feeling, highly enjoyable for those who possess it. To lose it would be a catastrophe, an odious state akin to going blind or not being alive at all. Synesthetes have a well-developed innate memory that is amplified by use of the parallel sense as a mnemonic device.

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19 Savant syndrome is illustrated in the 1988 film The Rain Man which was directed by Barry Levinson, starred Dustin Hoffman as Kim Peek (1951-2009) the ‘real’ Rain Man who Tammet was fortunate enough to meet and converse with. Tammet (2006:203) describes this meeting as “one of the happiest moments of my life”.
For Tammet, his relationships and associations with numbers are crucial. Due to his Asperger’s, he does not relate easily to other people and tends to replace them with numbers which have specific personalities due to his synaesthetic abilities. Tammet (2012:7) explains that this synaesthetic association with numbers helps him to better understand and relate to people. If he were to lose his synaesthesia, he says it would be truly “catastrophic”, affecting every aspect of his life (2012:7).

He (2006:7) goes on to write:

For as long as I can remember, I have experienced numbers in the visual, synesthetic way that I do. Numbers are my first language, one I often think and feel in. Emotions can be hard for me to understand or know how to react to, so I often use numbers to help me. If a friend says they feel sad or depressed, I picture myself sitting in the dark hollowness of number 6.

Tammet’s interest in art started after he moved to France in 2008. He is best known for his ability to identify prime numbers, his famous recital of Pi to 22 500 places and his ability to learn new languages, including Icelandic, in the course of one week (2006:205).

Figure 3.4: Daniel Tammet, (date unknown), *Pi landscape*, acrylic on paper, 420 x 297mm, Daniel Tammet website, 2016.
In an interview with Maureen Seaberg (2011:165), Tammet explains:

I like the idea that synaesthesia [fuels] creativity, that it [makes] connections or help[s] individuals to make connections, and that those connections can incite new ways of thinking, how we see the world. And that obviously is what art’s all about. It’s about giving people new eyes with which to see the world; pushing them, pumping them to come out of their old circuits of perception and thinking. I think synaesthesia is definitely linked to creativity.

The way in which Tammet sees the world is certainly different from how other people see the world. Tammet demonstrates his mathematical calculations in a painting, as evidence of how differently his mind works.

![Figure 3.5: Daniel Tammet, Fifty-three multiplied by one hundred and thirty-one, acrylic on paper, 420 x 297mm, year unknown, Daniel Tammet website, 2016](image)

Tammet (2006:5) explains:

In the illustration … I’m multiplying 53 by 131. I see both numbers as a unique shape and locate each spatially opposite the other. The space created between the two shapes creates a third, which is perceived as a new number: 6 943, the solution to the sum … the process takes a matter of seconds and happens spontaneously. It’s like doing math without having to think.
Tammet’s partner and artistic collaborator Jérôme Tabet, a French photographer who helps Tammet to create works such as Six (fig 3.6) attempts to capture what Tammet experiences as the number six. Chaplin (2005:sp) quoting Alexander Baumgarten states:

…poetry has both an intensive “clarity” to the extent that it takes concrete objects or images as its focus; and an extensive clarity, in so far as it is able to evoke a wide range of allusions and associations. Because of these characteristics, poetry and, by extension, all art is able to provide us with a form of condensed knowledge that captures our concrete and lived experience in ways that escape discursive prose.

In essence what Tammet, through Tabet’s photographs, presents to us is the “condensed knowledge” of his “lived experience” with numbers (Chaplin 2005:sp).

Figure 3.6: Jérôme Tabet and Daniel Tammet, Six, 2012, paper photo reproductions, 30 x 45 cm, original artwork, Daniel Tammet website, 2016
Tabet (in Tammet 2016:sp) uses Tammet’s synaesthesia as inspiration for his photographs, wanting to “reveal this mysterious and inaccessible world”, that Tammet so freely inhabits, to the rest of the world.

An analysis of Tabet’s photographs of Tammet’s numbers reveals that the images of the numbers, exhibited alongside Tammet’s descriptions of each number’s personality, can arguably be interpreted as portraiture. When a contemporary artist paints a portrait the single most important element of the process is for the artist to capture the presence of the person represented. It does not matter as much whether the features of the person are naturalistically correct, as long as the personality of the person can be conveyed in the painting. An example of an artist who paints portraits of a subject without revealing the specific person’s features is the South African artist Joni Brenner (b. 1969) (fig 3.7).

The abstract image of Tammet’s Six (fig 3.6) moves away from the realm of factual documentation and into the realm of the ‘internal portrait’. The blue, grey and black swirling colours are reminiscent of body scans, such as sonars. Thus making the invisible visible to the viewer. Just as McCracken’s landscape is not naturalistic, so Tabet’s photograph does not depict a factual realm, but rather an experiential and embodied reality inside Tammet.
For Tammet, the number 1 is almost the exact opposite of the number 6. Where 6 is a black hole, the number 1 is “like a big bang: white, shining” (Tammet 2016). The artwork One, resounds as true, in my synaesthetic experience.20

Once more we are shown a number portrait; this time of Tammet’s number One. It seems necessary to ask a non-synaesthetic viewer whether the work reminds them of the Big Bang and new beginnings, or whether they feel the movement implicit in the work moves outwards and inwards at the same time, or why it is portrayed in shades of white and grey? For me it does all these things, but for another synaesthete, it might not necessarily be the case, nor will it necessarily make sense for a non-synaesthete.

20 For me the number 1 is also white, with the feeling of new beginnings. It does not explode outward, or move, but I can correlate my association of 1 with Tammet’s perception, and Tabet’s understanding of Tammet’s perception thereof, directly.
We are helped, in any analysis of this work, by the possible universal meanings of One as a starting point or beginning and thus have a way into the work’s meaning as a concept or idea, if not, necessarily, as an embodied and experiential understanding thereof. The curated display of the photographs is also important since it assists viewers in understanding the content of the work. Each photograph is accompanied not only by the title of the work e.g. *One*, but also by a short explanation which Tammet has written about the number.

Tammet might be new to the world of art, but with the assistance of Tabet’s photography, he manages to give us a glimpse into his world of synaesthetic perceptions.

### 3.3 The induced synaesthetic art of the cyborg Neil Harbisson

Catalan artist Neil Harbisson, was born without the ability to see colour. He has a rare case of colour-blindness, in which he sees the world in tones and shades of grey. To this day, this is still how he perceives the world, however he is now able to hear colour. He (2016a:4) writes:

> In 2003, I started exploring the possibilities of sensory extensions via cybernetics with Adam Montandon. I met him at Dartington College of Arts; I was studying music composition and Adam came to the college to give a lecture on cybernetics. We started a project together with the aim to extend my senses. Being born completely colour-blind, my aim was to extend my colour perception to the level of other humans. Adam created a [piece of] software that transposed colours to sound and I started wearing a camera attached to my head that connected to a 5 kilo computer that I wore in a backpack which runs the software. I then used a pair of headphones to hear the colours. At first, I had to memorise the sound of each colour, but after some time this information became subliminal, I did not have to think about the notes, colour became a perception. And after some months, colour became a feeling, I started having favourite colours.

Technological advancement meant that, by 2012, Harbisson had an eyeborg/antenna\(^{21}\) implanted in his brain. The eyeborg reads the colours for Harbisson and vibrates in his skull, with the specific frequencies of the colours. In this way, he no longer has to wear a heavy backpack with a computer and headphones. His computer is now implanted in his brain, and the antenna is a permanent fixture.

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\(^{21}\) Harbisson has an antenna-like object implanted in his brain, which sees colours for him and translates them into sounds. The antenna is called an eyeborg.
Harbisson (2010:5) states that:

The eyeborg has changed the canons of beauty for me. I like listening to paintings by Andy Warhol, Joan Miró and Mark Rothko, because they all produce very clear notes. But Da Vinci, Velázquez and Munch can sound disturbing. Their paintings contain many shades of the same colour, so they produce clashing chords due to having notes that are very close to each other. They sound like the music from a scene in a horror movie when something bad is about to happen.

Harbisson (2012a) explains at a conference that although his reactions to sound and colour are learned, after living with his antenna for some time, he began to dream in colour. Having never perceived colour himself, with his eyes open, suddenly he could see colour with his eyes closed. When he began to dream in colour, he explains, he knew his eyeborg was fully integrated into his bodily system, and he had become a cyborg.

Due to his ability to hear colour using his eyeborg, Harbisson now creates ‘sound-portraits’ of people, by recording the sound of their faces. He does this by standing close to the person, and allowing his eyeborg to read the colours of the person’s face. This sends a sound vibration to Harbisson, which he can play back to the person through his antenna.

22 Harbisson (2010:3) uses the terms sonochromatism or sonochromatopsia (Latin: sono = sound + Greek: chromat = colour + Greek: -opsia = visual condition) to define his new condition. He explains that achromatopsia can no longer define his visual condition because achromatopsics cannot perceive nor distinguish colours. He also explains that synaesthesia does not define his condition accurately because the relation between colour and sound varies depending on each person, whereas sonochromatopsia is an extra sense that relates colour to sound objectively and equally to everyone.
Harbisson’s *Sonochromatic record* consists of a series of damaged vinyl records onto which he has transposed the sound of each track into colour. “The dominant colour of each track is painted on top of the vinyl so that the LPs can be played again through colour by using a mobile app” (Harbisson 2016b:sp).

Each vinyl is mounted and framed, to be hung on the wall and appreciated as a work of art. At first glance *Sonochromatic record* simply looks like a colourful record, where each track is painted in a different colour. However what Harbisson has created is a glimpse into his world of hearing colour.

Harbisson is breathing new life into these damaged records, by encouraging the viewer to download an app, in order to read/hear the record. By downloading the app onto a smartphone, one can use it to transpose colour into sound using Harbisson’s Sonochromatic Scales (fig 3.9). This allows the viewer to use the app on *Sonochromatic record* (fig 3.10) to translate the colours into sound, which allows the viewer to play the record as it was originally intended.
Rowland (2012:16) explains a similar phenomenon when encountering the work of Danish-Icelandic installation artist Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967):

Seeing the actual body of the tunnel as an art-object displayed in the museum is a part of experiencing the artwork; yet, it is not possible to see, feel or take part of this particular artwork from the outside. It has to be experienced from the inside and through the whole body, not merely the eyes.

From the outside, Harbisson’s work merely looks like a painted record. However, once the viewer fully understands how the work is designed to operate, and that the viewer, like Harbisson, is expected to use technology as a hearing/seeing device, the work becomes more accessible as a synaesthetic experience. These records were useless and discarded because they could no longer be played, but when a viewer uses an app on their smartphone to experience the work as it is intended, Harbisson is effectively allowing the viewer to listen to the record once more.

Harbisson is a learned synaesthete, which means that he had to memorise each note-to-colour association. Because he is not a born synaesthete, establishing his art as manifestations of synaesthesias becomes even more complex and compelling. Despite creating artworks based on colour, Harbisson still only sees in grey scale. The only way he can perceive colour is through the learned associations of sounds. For Harbisson, life has become more enriched, due to his colour reading. He explains that he dresses in clothes that do not necessarily look good, but ones that sound good to him: “Today I sound like middle C,” he revealed at a TEDx seminar in 2012.

Chaplin (2005:sp) explains: “Through habitual communal appropriation of particular sounds, the original affective associations fade into the background while the sounds themselves fuse with their newly acquired representational meaning”. At first, Harbisson had to learn which sound represents which colour, but after a while, the two senses merged, and although Harbisson could not see the red or green, he knew what he was looking at based on the notes he was able to hear. This led to experimentations with colour art. Harbisson began transposing music and sounds to coloured paintings. He began with simple sounds, but as he became more familiar with the process, he moved on to more complicated melodies and even famous speeches. One such work, is that of African American civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech, which is contrasted with a speech by the leader of the Nazi party, Adolf Hitler (fig. 3.11).
The method Harbisson uses to create these coloured sounds is to start at the centre of the canvas, hard-edging the notes/colours, until he runs out of canvas space. The result is mesmerising. The colours are chosen for the sounds they represent rather than for aesthetic purposes. Hitler’s speech, the more colourful of the two, seems to vibrate, not unlike the work associated with the Op Art movement of the 1960s. The greens and orange-reds of the Hitler work appear to be in equiluminance and, as a result, they vibrate against each other. The entire artwork seems to me to be constantly throbbing.

King’s speech, on the other hand, has a calming effect: its hues of purple, pink and blue all seem to work together and the layers of coloured rectangles display a softer, calmer throbbing, in comparison.
The colour difference between the two speeches could indicate the intentional difference between the two speakers. Martin Luther King Jr’s “I have a dream” speech consists mainly of analogous colours red, purple, blue and pink. Moving towards the centre of Harbisson’s work, blue becomes the prevailing colour, with pink and purple featuring in thinner lines. Adolf Hitler’s speech, on the other hand, shows analogous colours on the outside, red, purple and blue, but the further one moves to the centre of the painting, the more oppositional the colours become, with split complimentaries such as orange, green and magenta becoming predominant.

King speaks and sounds like the reverend he is, as if he is preaching to his congregation. He builds up slowly until the community is with him and then speaks more forcefully. Hitler’s tone, on the other hand, varies from the commencement of his speeches; he tries to rile the crowd and excite them in a much more forceful manner than King does. It is my opinion that this intentional tonal difference is what is reflected in Harbisson’s work. It is an indication of the intentions of the individuals as well as a synaesthetic representation of their words.
Interestingly, when Harbisson first showed his visual interpretation of the two speeches to people, he asked them which speech represents which man. The majority of people thought the more colourful speech of Hitler, referenced King and vice versa. Harbisson (2010:5) explains that the reason Hitler’s speech is so colourful is because of his use of different tones and intonations.23

Much like McCracken’s Imagine, which I found to be associated with purple, blues and pinks, the same is true of my associations for King’s speech. I also imagine his deep voice would be represented by a violet colour or a mauve.

Unlike true synaesthetes whose associations can only be triggered in one way, triggers for Harbisson’s perceptions interestingly can work in both directions. For example the letter B for me is light blue, but when I try to read my coloured blocks, I first need to translate them back into letters of the alphabet, before I can read the light blue block. In other words, the letter triggers the colour, but the colour does not trigger the letter. For Harbisson, his triggers can work in both directions. He can use his eyeborg to listen to a colour, but he can also listen to a piece of music and translate it into a colour.

Harbisson is not only a synaesthetic artist, he is also something altogether different: a cyborg artist. He (cited in Frank 2015:sp) believes: “It’s best to use cybernetics to extend our senses and perceptions of reality. The more we can perceive, the better we can understand where we are and who we are. I think it’s an essential part of our evolution”.

3.4 Conclusion

Each of the artists I have discussed in this chapter uses their synaesthesia in a different way in their artistic process: whether it be as a collaborative effort, such as that of Tammet and Tabet, as traditional oil or acrylic on canvas in the landscape equivalent art of McCracken, or as the vibrating coloured sounds of Harbisson. Each of these artists has something in common despite their different associations and artistic appropriations and perceptions. They are all synaesthetic artists trying to show the world, their unique, perceived realities.

23 My own synaesthetic reaction to the speeches is that each speech correctly represents the speaker. I would perhaps associate Hitler with a more muddy green, but the “I have a dream” speech of King is represented by exactly the right colours for me. Perhaps this says something about my associations with the word dream as well as my perceived idea of a dream.
Philosopher Ellen Dissanayke (cited in Chaplin 2005:sp) is convinced that “the arts have even more to contribute in promoting important concerns of the group and this, in turn, enhances the survival of the species”. What each synaesthetic artist, including myself, is therefore trying to do, is to include non-synaesthetes into the world of synaesthesia, to share our experience and to allow other synaesthetes to realise that they are not as strange and alone as they might believe. My own synaesthetic process and perceptions are explained and analysed in Chapter Four.
Chapter Four

Synaesthetic freedoms

This chapter is focused on my creative process as a synaesthetic artist. As previously discussed, I am a grapheme synaesthete. I associate letters of the alphabet, numbers and certain words and people with specific colours. My synaesthesia is internal, rather than external, meaning that, when reading for example, I do not project my colours onto the page, but rather see the colours in my mind’s eye. The word ‘see’ is a relative term here, as it is the easiest way in which to describe the experience. It is not, however the most accurate. A synaesthetic association is experienced by being felt as well as seen internally. There is a perception of rightness which accompanies the condition. Where one usually relies on one’s conscience to differentiate between right and wrong, a similar level of consciousness is employed during the synaesthetic experience in order to ascertain whether the correct colour represents a particular letter, number or day of the week. If, for example, the colours of a rugby team’s jerseys do not match the name of the team, I feel an immediate disconnect and discomfort, which results in me either supporting the wrong team, or simply to stop watching as the synaesthetic disruption is too intense. This makes the condition a “bodily affair” (Chaplin 2005:5) rather than a purely visual or auditory perception.

In the previous chapters I made my own voice secondary as a strategy, in order to show points of contact, whether contradictory or complimentary. I now bring my own voice to the fore through an analysis of my own artistic practice as well as my embodied experience of grapheme synaesthesia.

In Chapter Three I relayed how synaesthetic artists McCracken, Tammet and Harbisson apply their synaesthetic perceptions to create their art: McCracken through synaesthetic landscape paintings or soundscapes, Tammet through number portraits and Harbisson with his coloured encoding of portraits and famous speeches. In this chapter, I now use my own practice to showcase how my synaesthetic artworks embody notions of otherness as well as types of freedoms which underpin the conceptualisation of my work.

Like Harbisson, my artworks rely on my synaesthetic alphabet of colour to function as a coding device, in order to bring to the fore the notion of freedoms and the artist-as-other. Being an artist, free thinker and grapheme synaesthete, I consider myself as an other. My perceptions of the world are not considered to be the norm, placing me, along with most artists in my opinion, as an outsider. Although my social group accepted my synaesthetic
notions – many being synaesthetes themselves – the majority of people I have encountered have not understood these perceptions.

For as long as I can remember, my innate stubbornness prevented me from conforming to what is considered ‘normal’; instinctively seeking non-conformity at every turn and fundamentally informing my strongly held belief in freedoms in general, and freedom of expression in particular.

An argument could be made that my love of freedom stems from an abhorrence of confinement due to various operations I had as a child, one being a back operation, where I was confined to a back-brace for six months. Experiencing othering myself from my peers, has resulted in my strong stance against acts of othering, believing that all ‘others’ in our society form an integral part thereof. I thus identify strongly with the counter culture movements of the 1960s, to which I was exposed at a young age through rock music listened to by my parents, particularly The Beatles and The Rolling Stones.


> [T]he condition of Otherness is a person’s non-conformity to and with the social norms of society; and to the condition of disenfranchisement (political exclusion), either by the activities of the State or by the activities of the social institutions (e.g. the professions), which are respectively invested with political and social power. Therefore, in the condition of Otherness, the person is alienated from the centre of society, and is placed at the societal margin, for being the Other.

Through my grapheme synaesthetic art, I establish myself as an other, linking my notion of otherness with artists and musicians who were, or are, also perceived to be other. These musicians and artists, are often revered for their otherness. One such other is John Lennon who, according to Hunter Davies’s (2009:84) biography of The Beatles, was described by his primary school headmaster “as sharp as a needle. He can do anything, as long as he chooses to do it. He will not do anything stereotyped”. By the time Lennon was in his second year of high school “it was Lennon and Shotton24 versus the rest of the school, refusing all discipline or imposed ideas” (Davies 2009:89). Lennon’s refusal to conform stayed with him for life and later resulted in his writing songs such as *Imagine* (1971) and *Give Peace a Chance* (1969).

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24 Pete Shotton was Lennon’s best friend at the time.
4.1 Key principles which underpin past artworks

4.1.1 Synaesthesia

I only realised I had grapheme synaesthesia, or indeed that synaesthesia existed when I was in high school, and even then I did not pay much attention to the condition. For most of my life until that point, I had been fascinated by colour associations and would endlessly question my mother, brother and father about which colour they associated with which letter, number or name. Since no two synaesthetes have the same associations, our answers always differed from one another.

As I mentioned previously, my father does not experience synaesthesia, so his responses were frustrating in their inconsistency. Due to my mother and brother – as well as some of my friends – having the condition of grapheme synaesthesia, I did not think that my synaesthetic perceptions were abnormal. Occasionally someone would look at me strangely or laugh when I said, for example, that my favourite part of the rock concert I went to was a particular song, because everything became infused with a luminous green light.

My mother finally found out that what we experience is called synaesthesia, after reading an article on it in the newspaper. We realised, then, that perhaps my father was not the strange one, and when someone asked me what I meant by a particularly synaesthetic turn of phrase, I could respond that I had this condition of seeing colours.

In my third year of undergraduate study in Fine Art, in 2008, I created my first synaesthetic artwork. Having come to the realisation that what appealed to me in artworks was colour, I decided to embrace my own coloured world and created *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose* (2008).
The work consisted of Rothko-inspired paintings spelling out each word of the French phrase above, which in English means, *the more things change, the more they stay the same*. Like Rothko, there was a rectangular shape of colour above a smaller rectangular shape of a different colour. The bottom colour was the colour of the word, and the top the colour of the letter.

In order to translate this work, I supplied an abacus which depicted my complete alphabet of colour with each letter painted on a wooden block. The viewer could therefore decipher the work, and by so doing, communicate synaesthetically. The concept behind this work was that, in order to fully communicate with one another, we must understand each other’s language, whether it be coloured or not. The irony of this work is that, even if it had been successfully translated, one would still need to understand the French, or find someone who does.

This theme of communication and miscommunication as well as freedom of expression is something which appears in almost all of my artworks since that first synaesthetic work. For

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25 My alphabet of colour which I use in my artworks is only an approximation of the synaesthetic experience. Synaesthesia is more complex than a colour block, as discussed in Chapter Two, as each colour is accompanied by its own texture and feel. The colours themselves are also an approximation, finding the absolute true colour for each letter is nearly impossible, in my opinion.
me, it is important that my viewers interact with the work; they should follow the clues which I provide and immerse themselves in my synaesthetic world in order to understand the meaning of the work. I use synaesthesia as a coding device in most of my artworks, sometimes as a strategy for censorship whilst at other times, as a key to the synaesthetic coding with which a viewer can engage in order to make headway in the work’s decoding.

In *Reading colour* (2009), I extended the concept of freedom of expression.

![Figure 4.14: Ilka van Schalkwyk. *Reading colour*, 2009. Artist’s book, digital print on Gesso, 211 pages](image)

This artist’s book consists of 12 A2-sized pages, and 12 protest songs, typed on a typewriter onto A4-sized pages, framed behind glass and clips.

The inspiration for this work is two-fold. Firstly I wanted to create an artwork using my synaesthetic alphabet of colour, in order to showcase my perception of the numerical and alphabetical world. Secondly, I wanted to explore the concept of outsiderness, language and freedom of expression. The artist’s book is a translation of Salman Rushdie’s 1990 novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* which he wrote whilst he was living in exile, as he continues to be, to this day.26 Although marketed as a children’s book, the novel truly promotes the idea

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26 Sayyid Ruhollah Mūsavi Khomeini (1902-1989), known in the Western world as Ayatollah Khomeini, was an Iranian Shia Muslim religious leader, philosopher, revolutionary, and politician. He was the founder of the
of freedom of expression. In it Rushdie writes of the land of Chup and the land of Gup. The Hindi words *Chup* and *Gup* respectively mean quiet and loud. In the land of Chup no one is allowed to speak and the more extreme Chupwallas even have zipped lips, including their leader Khattam Shud, whose name translates as The End.

The polarising themes of good versus evil and the ability to speak versus enforced silence, speak strongly of the frustration of freedom of expression being denied. When it came to choosing a book to translate into colour and use as part of my artwork, *Haroun* was appropriate. I used my oldest copy, the pages yellow with age, scanning each page individually into my computer. I then masked out each letter with the correct colour in Photoshop, according to my synaesthetic alphabet. Once the entire book had been translated into coloured blocks, it was reprinted and bound to once again, resemble the original book.

Accompanying the artist’s book are 12 A2-sized pages from the book, which have also been translated into coloured blocks. Twelve is significant in that there are 12 chapters in the book. The chosen pages are a combination of my favourite passages as well as key events and phrases in the story.

Each of these pages has a corresponding protest song which is exhibited next to the pages. The songs deal with various issues and are written by a variety of artists/musicians. The songs are presented on pages which are A4 in size and, inspired by Willem Boshoff’s *KykAfrikaans* (1976-1980), have been typed on a typewriter. Each of the songs contain one word which has been masked out by my synaesthetic coloured blocks, unlike the book and the pages, the songs’ letters shine through the coloured blocks. This colour-coded word is the key to deciphering the work.

Each coloured word can be found on the corresponding page, if the viewer searches for the colour pattern. Once found, the viewer can read that one word on the page. I elected to provide a total of 12 in this manner, which means that only five letters of the alphabet have

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Islamic Republic of Iran and the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that saw the overthrow of the last Shah of Iran. Khomeini took offense to Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 and ordered a fatwa or death sentence against the writer (Braziller 1993:[Sp]).

Boshoff’s *KykAfrikaans* is broadly an artist’s book which consists of 90 original poems. Each poem is created with a Hermes 2000 manual typewriter. Boshoff (2007:40) states that at times the poems “take issue with literary prejudices such as the conventional requirements of coherence and economy of writing. They frequently subvert orthodoxy and instead venerate triviality or ambiguity in the guise of being meticulously and assiduously composed”.
been excluded. The viewer, if so inclined, can then decipher the work back into letters, which enables them to read the work.

Figure 4.15: Ilka van Schalkwyk. *Reading colour*, 2009. Detail of protest song 210x297mm with accompanying page 420x594mm, digital print on paper

The artist’s book is displayed on a podium, with a single spotlight on the book. Facing the podium are the 12 pages with their accompanying protest songs. Each of the works on the wall has a light shining on it, while the rest of the room is in darkness. The idea is to encourage the visitor to address the pages as an audience by reading from the book. However on opening the book, the viewer finds himself/herself confronted by colourful little blocks, a language that he or she cannot understand. The frustration of not being able to read, imparts upon the viewer the feeling of being censored and having one’s freedom of expression taken away. The index or ‘audience’, consisting of the A2-sized pages, must then be consulted and only once the viewer has consulted with the pages can he or she commence reading, ‘crack the code’ and understand the text.

The purpose of allowing the viewer access to my synaesthetic experience, is not only to play a game of hide-and-seek, but to enforce the feeling of what it is like to be a synaesthete; to
see things differently. This experience can be isolating to the viewer, who becomes an outsider or an other.

When the viewer accepts this notion of the synaesthetic other and immerses him- or herself in the deciphering process in order to access the full meaning of the artwork, then, as Claude Lefort (1924-2010) in Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and Invisible* (1968:xi) puts it:

> From now on it is what it says and nothing more, a complete word that refers only to itself, rests only on itself, and from which the memory of its origin fades away. The writer has disappeared; hence forth we read his work.

Once one immerses oneself in the synaesthetic experience, one can become an insider, reading the work as it is, rather than as an outsider trying to understand an unfamiliar language.

Merleau-Ponty (1968:xlvi) explains that “the visible is a landscape, a topography yet to be explored, uncultivated being still, wild being still. The true philosophy is to learn again to see the world.” The ‘breadcrumbs’ I have left forces the audience to find and interpret the work in a way which allows me to facilitate the possibility of seeing the world through the eyes of a synaesthete.

### 4.1.2. Freedom and the other

In my current work, I explore various forms of freedoms. However, what freedom means to one person, is not necessarily what it means to another. This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Since I created my first synaesthetic artwork in 2008 it has become clear to me, whether consciously or unconsciously, that the notion of freedom, particularly freedom of expression, has been a critical theme in my art. As a synaesthetic artist, I experience the world differently from how those around me do so, including other synaesthetes, since no two synaesthetes have the same synaesthetic associations. As I often make reference to visual artists, poets, musicians and free thinkers as constituting others, the work of French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), John Lennon of the Beatles and American musician, poet and artist Patti Smith (b. 1946), amongst many others, have become important to me in terms of the arts’ contribution “… to a general sense of belonging and to the important task of community building” (Chaplin 2005:5). Artists therefore contribute a sense of belonging to society, allowing an other to identify with another other: the artist. What artists exemplify, I argue, is freedom.
In *Plus ça change*, I revealed my innate otherness by allowing the viewer access to my synaesthetic associations. Because the nature of synaesthesia is unique to each synaesthete, sharing my condition is rather like allowing someone to live in my skin for a short period of time. What I try to achieve by revealing my synaesthetic alphabet, is to show that everyone sees the world differently, whether synaesthetically, or not. In order to communicate successfully with one another, we need to make allowances for human idiosyncrasies, allowing each other the freedom to express oneself in one’s own way.

*The Route to Creativity* (2016)\(^28\) expands on the concept of artistic expression, focusing on the route of the creative experience: how one artist influences another, be they in the same field or not. After reading Patti Smith’s autobiography entitled *Just kids* (2010), in which she tells the story of her relationship with the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, and how they influenced and helped each other to become artists – each being the other’s muse – I was inspired to create *The Route to Creativity*.

Figure 4.16: Ilka van Schalkwyk. *Route to Creativity*, 2016. Mixed media, 440x650mm

In order to create this work, I drilled holes into two pieces of wood side by side in the shape of a portrait of Mapplethorpe on one piece and Smith on the other. Behind the wood lights shine through the holes creating a luminescence, a metaphor for the artistic influences that they had. In front of the wood is a layer of glass. On the glass, coloured blocks are printed,  

\(^{28}\) This work was specifically created for the SA Taxi Association Art Awards and was part of the finalists’ exhibition in 2016 at the Lizamore and Associates Gallery in Rosebank, Johannesburg.
each representing a letter of the alphabet. Each ‘page’ has a poem printed on it. The poem for Mapplethorpe was written by me after seeing one of his photographs of flowers in the Grande Palais in Paris in 2011. The poem for Smith is entitled *Little lost leaf* which was inspired by her song *Wild, Wild Leaves* (1988), written by Smith for Mapplethorpe after his death in 1989.

I used images derived from photographs, the one of Mapplethorpe was taken by Smith and the one of Smith was taken by Mapplethorpe (Smith 2010:259,281). The wood I used for the work is maple, a nod to the fact that they are both American and a play on Mapplethorpe’s surname. In this work the synaesthetic code is used as a censoring device, because there is no alphabetical correlation provided, the poem is purely visual, and private.

Merleau-Ponty (in Edie1964:17) states “I will never know how you see red, and you will never know how I see it; but this separation of consciousness is recognised only after a failure of communication”. Most of my synaesthetic artworks explore this notion and they seek to either instigate a failure of communication or to indicate where a failure of communication has taken place, in order to exploit the separation of consciousness which occurs daily, due to our different perceptions of the world.

Rushdie in his collection of essays entitled *Imaginary homelands* (1991:19) grapples with the notion that we create art for someone. He states: “This raises immediately the question of whom one is writing ‘for’: My own, short, answer is that I have never had a reader in mind. I have ideas, people, events, shapes, and I write ‘for’ things, and hope that the completed work will be of interest to others. But which others?” Although Rushdie speaks of writing, the same principle can be applied to the creation of visual art. I too create my artworks ‘for things’ and hope that the ideas expressed resonate with the viewer. There is however another audience to whom my work can speak; that audience is the synaesthetic audience.

Many synaesthetes live in ignorance of their synaesthesia as discussed in Chapter Two. The logic of my thinking is that if I share my synaesthetic work with the broad spectrum of society, there is a possibility that other synaesthetes will recognise their own condition through my work.
The presence of 1960s and 1970s Rock music in my work is due not only to my love of the music of the era, particularly that of the Beatles, but also the focus on freedom which defined the 1960s in particular. There occurred a radical shift in the mindset of the youth of the 1960s when compared to the 1950s. The 1960s saw the end of segregation in America, as well as equal rights for women. Where the parents of the youths had been proud to fight in the Second World War for their country, a large part of the generation of the 1960s felt that the war in Vietnam was an unjust and unnecessary war, resulting in mass protests in the United States of America (USA).

Mike Evans and Paul Kingsbury explain the events that led to the mind-shift of the youth in the 1960s, in their book *Woodstock: Three days that rocked the world* (2009:14):

At the start of the 1960s the scene was set for some radical social and political changes. First, in 1962, came the Cuban Missile Crisis, and for a time the whole world seemed to be counting down to atomic war. The following year, the assassination of President John F Kennedy deeply traumatized the American public. Suddenly young Americans began to question the political status quo that their parents had taken for granted. But the single factor that galvanised the concern of US youth like no other was their country’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

Another major factor of the 1960s was the recreational use of Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), which was still legally available at pharmacies until October 1968. LSD as discussed in Chapter Two results in a temporary synaesthetic experience. The hallucinogenic properties of the drug, mixed with the induced synaesthetic symptoms during the high, can explain the psychedelic colours and metaphorical use of language in the music of the era, an example of the type of language can be seen in the song *Lucy in the sky with diamonds* (1967) by the Beatles on their album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Inspired by The Beatles’s song *Yesterday* (1965), *Yesterday*29 (2012), the exhibition, focused on newspapers and the news around the world that everyone reads every day about everyday’s happenings. I chose seven newspapers, from around the world for the year 2011. Each newspaper referred to a weekday.

My fascination with language and synaesthesia allowed the idea to grow. Collectively, each canvas making up this work writes a sentence from the song *Yesterday*. The size and colour of the canvases and their images were determined by the sentence: “Yesterday came

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29 The exhibition entitled *Yesterday* (2012) was my first solo exhibition and was part of the prize for winning ABSA l’Atelier in 2010.
suddenly”, a $Y$ for example is green and would be a rectangular shape, as opposed to an $A$ which is red and more square in shape. In the background of each canvas is a digital print of important events in history that occurred on that particular day that I was able to source.

Figure 4.17: Ilka van Schalkwyk. Detail of *Yesterday*, 2012. Oil on digitally printed canvas

The work refers to the inconsequentiality of life; how even the most important events get swallowed up in the humdrum of everyday life. If enough time is allowed to pass, very few remember what precisely happened on any day in history. I used translucency and layers in my painting technique to enhance the ephemeral quality of world events and its news and to create fractured images: It’s only a suggestion of an image, because it is memory-based.
The body of work comprises 23 canvases, 21 of which are painted with oil paint. With the images determined by the front page photograph for that specific day, the date is the title of each piece. The other two canvases are mixed media works with images relating to making and eating breakfast, specifically scrambled eggs.

Figure 4.18: Ilka van Schalkwyk. *Yesterday, Scrambled eggs 1 & 2*, 2012. Guerrilla print, Acrylic on canvas, 620x930mm each

This serves a double purpose: it relates back to the original inspiration for the song *Yesterday* (a bit of an ‘in-joke’ for Beatles fans)\(^{30}\) as well as commenting on the fact that stories in newspapers are read in the morning and then forgotten by the next day.

I also created one new media work in which I translated the song *Yesterday* letter by letter into blocks of colour, similar to *Reading colour*, as well as 84 ink on paper drawings. The drawings show more events of 2011 and work as a key to understanding the installation/exhibition. Certain images, such as 3rd February, are represented as both a drawing and a painting. This helps the viewer to understand that each painting is an image

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\(^{30}\) The song *Yesterday*’s melody was originally conceived by Paul McCartney, but at the time of composing it, he did not yet have the song’s lyrics: in order to remember the melody, he used the words “Scrambled eggs”, which has the same amount of syllables as “Yesterday”. To see a performance of the “original” *Yesterday* watch [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btC2_t8HZP4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btC2_t8HZP4)
from a newspaper and since the paintings are titled according to the date, the reference to newspapers becomes understandable.

The drawings are divided into sets of seven – representing a week – showing the newspapers I chose to represent for each day of the week. Each set is coloured differently, each week representing a month of the year and the colour representing my personal synaesthetic colour association with each of the months. For example January, for me, is red, so there are seven red drawings next to each other. The next row would be green, for February and every row begins with The Daily Telegraph and follows as shown below.
Yesterday shares many similarities with my previous work, Reading colour. Both explore the relationship between image and text, and both exploit different layers connecting synaesthesia to language. The main difference between the two is that, whereas the previous concept focused on freedom of expression, Yesterday’s concept focuses on past events and how quickly they are forgotten. Hunter Davies (2009:sp) aptly expresses this in his authorised biography of The Beatles: “Today, it all sounds like fiction, yet it was only yesterday”.

Woodstock32 and The Beatles, particularly John Lennon, often feature prominently in my artworks as they represent the spirit of the 1960s counterculture movement. Mike Evans and Paul Kingsbury (2009:14) state that

[t]he Woodstock festival is considered the apogee of the youth-driven ‘counterculture’ that flourished in the US and other Western countries from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. A reaction to the conservative attitudes of post- World War II society, and stimulated by opposition to the war in Vietnam, the counterculture espoused antimilitarism, racial equality, women’s rights, artistic freedom and sexual liberation … Central to the counterculture was the new popular music of the 1960s.

Throughout the 1960s music, Rock and folk in particular, was the preferred language of protest and freedom. Smith (Smith 2011: [Sp]) explains: “Rock ‘n Roll belongs to the people

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31 The newspapers were chosen to reflect the news from around the world, it was imperative that I was able to access them online as well as having access to their back copies.

32 Woodstock was an anti Vietnam War, three day music festival held in 1969in Bethel, White Lake New York and attracted over 400 000 people.
… I’ve embraced Rock ‘n Roll because it encompasses all the things I’m interested in: poetry, revolution, sexuality, political activism – all of these things can be found in Rock and Roll”. The liberation and anti-establishment messages found in the music of the 1960s and early 1970s is what entices me to use the lyrics from some of the music from this era in my art.

4.2 Current Work *Throwing stones: Paradoxical freedoms* (2016-2018)

The main body of work consists of 14 significant speeches in history, hand-cut from Fabriano paper with an image of the speech-maker printed onto the paper. There are seven speeches which can be considered heroic and seven which are considered villainous. Overlaying these speeches is a speech quote from the larger speech encoded using my synaesthetic language and printed on large sheets of tracing paper. The words shine through the coloured blocks on the overlays which creates a purposeful effect of revealing and concealing the words simultaneously. The coloured blocks do not correlate with the correct letters and need to be decoded by the viewer first. Facing the heroes’ and villains’ speeches are 14 guerrilla prints\(^{33}\) on canvas. These works are coloured to spell out the name of the exhibition *Throwing stones*. The images depicted are based on current as well as historic events made using collages as a point of reference.

Each guerrilla print correlates to and faces each hero/villain’s speech. Around the edge of each guerrilla print are lyrics to a song which refers to the issues addressed in the collage as well as the corresponding hero/villain. I refer to the guerrilla prints as *The wall of rock*, since each print not only correlates to a specific song, but also features an image of the musician or band.

The work is paradoxical in nature, as implied by the second half of the title *Paradoxical freedoms*. When one reads the speeches of the heroes and villains, most of the speeches’ content is about freedom and fighting for freedom. The fight for freedom is considered a noble cause and yet, if carefully read and placed in context, some of the speeches only seek freedom as personal gain or at the cost of/or the suppression of another. The wall of rock adds to this paradoxical dilemma of freedom, by reflecting the repetitive nature of mankind’s problems.

\(^{33}\) *Guerrilla prints* is the term I use for the type of silk-screening I do. It is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.
In the exhibition, the viewer will not be able to draw on knowledge of my previous works, I therefore provide an artist’s book as well as three posters/pages, which serve as an index or a key. Each page is a passage from a book, the letters have been masked by my synaesthetic alphabet, but are still visible through the coloured blocks. The first of the pages is the opening paragraph of Charles Dickens’s (1812-1870) *A Tale of Two Cities*, which commences with the words: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness…” (1859:1). The second page is a passage from Harper Lee’s (1926-2016) *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960:226), specifically a passage from Atticus Finch’s closing speech during the trial of Tom Robinson where he reflects on how all men are created equal. The final page is from Salman Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands*. The chosen passage reads as follows:

Redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it. And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized. “The struggle of a man against power”, Milan Kundera has written, “is the struggle of memory against forgetting”. Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images, they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of truth (Rushdie 1991:14).

The reason for presenting the viewer with these passages, in coloured blocks, at the start of the exhibition is to give the viewer an indication of what is to come and to contextualise the exhibition, framing the concepts upon which the exhibition is created. Dickens speaks of the troubles of the world at large; Lee comments on the rights of each individual; and Rushdie speaks of power and truth.

Throughout the artworks, my own synaesthesia both aids and obscures the meaning of the works. In order to read the speeches, the viewer must look through the colours and the opaque paper to see the light shining through the letters from behind. On the speeches, my synaesthetically-induced blocks of colour obscure the words, but on the edges of the prints facing the speeches, the letters are clearly visible. The three pages from the books help to contextualise not only the concept of paradoxical freedoms, but also explain the way a synaesthete, particularly a grapheme synaesthete, experiences the world.

The artist’s book, which forms part of the exhibition, is intended to act as a key to reading and comprehending the many layers of the larger installed work. The artist’s book is A4 in

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34 The same passage is used as the opening page of the accompanying artist’s book.
size, the cover is dark blue and it bears the title *Throwing stones: Paradoxical freedoms* printed in black. As the reader opens the book, they see the first page, which bears the quote from Rushdie’s *Imaginary homelands* with a note added in ink stating “in other words, stick it to the man”.

The artist’s book also acts as an expansion of the installation; it not only provides a better understanding of my synaesthetic perception, but, if read carefully, links the speeches with the prints by juxtaposing the two linked works. The intention is to make apparent the similarities and differences that link the two works, expanding on the paradox as well as on the theme of freedoms and othering.

In order to fully understand my creative process, it is important to note that, although the concept of my work is essential, the techniques and methods employed in creating the artworks are as important. In all of my artwork there is a hand wrought quality to the pieces. For my purposes, creating the artworks become what Chaplin (2005:5) refers to as a “bodily affair”. *Throwing stones* is no exception.

### 4.3 Visual modalities and guerrilla printing

The technique I chose to apply in creating *Throwing stones* is a primitive form of silk-screening which I call guerrilla printing I start by building my own screen which fits the appropriate size of the work’s paper substrates. The cloth I use is organza rather than silk, which creates a more textured, unpredictable finish.

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35 What Rushdie explains so eloquently in *Imaginary Homelands* can be summed up in the phrase “stick it to the man”. The phrase stick it to the man refers to an act of civil disobedience against the power of the man.
Each stencil is hand-cut from sturdy brown paper, which, due to the thickness of the paper creates a raised edge where the paint is applied. I use acrylic paint, mixed with a gel medium to bulk-up the paint’s viscosity. This is applied to the screen and stencil and printed onto the paper substrate using a squeegee. Due to the nature of this printing process the stencils are, in most cases, only able to be used once, without test prints or proofs, meaning that each print is unique, displaying all associated printing glitches and mistakes.
What I look for, and embrace, in using this printing process are the little nuances or slippages that occur. The irregular textures and miss-registrations, in some parts, create aesthetic qualities which I find beguiling. Each work is unique not only due to the stencil, but the texture, colour and form as well. Each stencil is hand-cut and labour intensive. The image which has been projected onto the stencil paper is cut out so that only the lines of the drawing remain. It is important that the image, when cut out, consists of only one line, linked throughout. This allows me to print, first the bottom layer and then, using the stencil, the top layer. The print is a one-off as the stencil cannot be reused, and it is critical that it prints the first time, for better or for worse.

36 Purposeful miss-registration plays a role in the work of American Pop artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987), see, for instance, his work *Marilyn 1967* (Eric Shanes 2005:132). The Pop Art movement, specifically Warhol’s silkscreens of 1960s icons, are an influence on my work and process.
In some cases, for example in *She’s a rainbow* the stencil and colours used did not work the first or even the second time, and the process had to be repeated until finally the image was achieved. The ghostly lines in figure 22 are the leftover marks from the previous attempts and, although not intentional, they create an index of a precarious printing process.
With this type of printing, there is only so much I can control and the effects created outside of my control are what I seek. The work becomes organic, haptic, open to chance and is visually lively. As such, I purposefully reject the flat, perfectly registered image which could be achieved through careful painting, professional screen-printing or digital printing.

*Throwing stones* consists of 14 Fabriano pages, 841x1189mm in size. Each of these pages has been guerrilla-printed using the technique of a hand-cut stencil on a homemade screen. Onto this image a speech is written in my own handwriting which is then cut out of the paper, also by hand. The handmade quality of the printing process is replicated in the method of cutting I use: painstakingly hand-cutting each letter from the printed paper using a scalpel-type knife. Facing these cut-outs are another 14 guerrilla prints, which collectively, are *The wall of rock*. Each of the prints is linked to a song from the 1960s or 1970s and the title of each print is derived from the title of the associated song. The colours used for these prints are picked to represent specific letters from my alphabet. When placed in the correct order, they spell *Throwing stones*, the name of the work. The linear elements of the images are printed in a contrasting colour, to enhance the colour of the letter.
The laboriousness of the process and the handmade quality of the work, which allows for slippages to occur, fits into the concept of the work, which is paradoxical in nature, by blurring the lines between purposeful effects and those that appear, by chance, due to the processes used.

Merleau-Ponty (1968:xlvii) states that:

> When through the water’s thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it despite the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without this flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it as it is…

I suggest that this is the way one should perceive my artworks. One should not look at the works and think that, without the perceived slippages, the work would be neater and more clinical. Rather, the viewer is asked to realise that the slippages, textures and colour nuances are an intrinsic part of the work, purposefully created in such a manner and in counter to today’s slick digital printing culture.

### 4.4 Concepts which underlie the exhibition

*Throwing stones* is a continuation of the concepts which are prominent in my previous works: freedoms, othering, synaesthesia and 1960s counterculture movements. The title *Throwing stones: Paradoxical freedoms* has two parts. Firstly *Throwing stones* references the saying that people in glass houses should not throw stones. It is also, a pun on the band the Rolling Stones and the fact that 1960s rock music plays a large role in the conceptualisation of the work. The second part of the title *Paradoxical freedoms* is an accurate description of what the work is trying to convey. Margaret Wertheim (cited in Ralph Rugoff 2013:133) states that Augustus De Morgan (1806-71) defines a paradox as an “exception to prevailing views”. An exception to prevailing views, and the continuity of the same problems faced by humankind, many of which are self-inflicted, is at the core of my work.

The work comprises 14 speeches made throughout history, which have become significant. As stated, half the speeches are considered and contextualised in my work as heroic and half as villainous. I purposefully set up a dilemma for a reader when confronting these speeches in that, although some, such as American politician George Wallace’s *Segregation forever* (1963) speech is unquestionably morally unsound, as it was written by a member of the Klu Klux Klan and refuses to acknowledge the basic human rights of people of colour, most speak of fighting for freedom, which, on the whole, is considered a righteous cause. A close reading of the work reveals the dilemma in that ideals of freedom feature in all the speeches,
yet what one person considers to be freedom is not necessarily another’s freedom. For example, when Hitler speaks of freedom and Churchill speaks of freedom, history has shown us that the one’s freedom is not the other’s. My juxtaposition of the hero and the villain was chosen to illustrate the contrasting view of freedoms and this contradiction frames the paradox in my title. An image of each of my chosen heroes and villains, as I term them, is printed in the background on the Fabriano paper. Their selected speech is then written over the image and cut out by hand. The colour I chose to use for the prints is Davy’s Grey. This colour gives the paper the appearance of parchment, contextualising the time frame of the events referred to in the speech as having past. The lines of the print remain the white colour of the paper, and with the cut-out sections of the speech being even lighter, the figure is not overtly visible. Attached to the front of the speeches is a page of tracing paper onto which an extract from the speech has been digitally printed in blocks of my synaesthetic colour. This extract does not overlap the referenced part of the speech, and the opaqueness of the paper used creates a shadowy effect, particularly where the tracing paper colour lifts away from the paper-cut speech and the text becomes less legible. This effect acknowledges that individual people might fade from the world, but their words, consequent actions and their effects, remain forever in the present.

Figure 4.24: Ilka van Schalkwyk. Throwing stones: Paradoxical freedoms, John Lennon, 2017. Mixed media, 840 x 1200mm.
The blurred letters and shadowy figures mirror the purposeful effects which have been created by the guerrilla printing process I employed in creating these works. The speeches face *The wall of rock* so that the works jutuxtapose, as well as mirror, each other. The heroes and villains represent the establishment, whilst *The wall of rock* represents the anti-establishment views of the musicians of the 1960s and 1970s. *The wall of rock* as well as referencing the music and musicians of the period also includes selected images of events that occurred throughout history and which have had an effect on my life. Some of the events reflect the consequences of the actions taken by the establishment, some virtuous, others not. Each of the 14 acrylic-on-canvas guerrilla prints has a speech confronting it. Fourteen was chosen as there are 14 letters in the title *Throwing stones*. For *The wall of rock* each canvas’s colour was chosen to represent a letter from my synaesthetic alphabet. The entire wall spells out *Throwing stones*.

![Image of artwork](image.png)

**Figure 4.25:** Ilka van Schalkwyk. Part of *Throwing stones: Paradoxical freedoms*, 2017.

Each of the prints/letters of *The wall of rock* corresponds to a particular song, the lyrics of which are written around the frame of the work. The majority of the songs were chosen from the 1960s and 1970s. The reason for focusing on this period is due to the nature of the actions taken by not only the musicians, but the citizens and politicians of the time.37

As New York artist Suze Rotolo (1943-2011) cited in (Evans and Kingsbury 2009:14) put it:

> The 1960s were an amazing time, an eventful time of protest and rebellion. An entire generation had permission to drink alcohol and die in a war at eighteen, but it had no voting voice until the age of twenty-one. Upheaval was inevitable. Talk made music,

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37 For a timeline of the events that occurred from 1960-69 in RSA, UK, USA and elsewhere, see Appendix B.
and music made talk. Action was in the civil rights marches, marches against the bomb, and marches against an escalating war in Vietnam. It was a march out of time, too – out of the restricted and rigid morality of the 1950s. The Beats had already cracked the façade and we, the next generation, broke through it.

Within each song there is a part of the lyric which is written in my coloured synaesthetic alphabet. This line from the song is meant to reflect on the images chosen for that particular print and also relates back to the speech facing the work.

The mixture of old and new imagery in the work is purposeful. Like *Yesterday*, *Throwing stones* investigates the repetitive nature of the world’s problems and the inconsequentiality of life. The year 1962 saw the world perched on the edge of an atomic war, today in 2017, not much has changed. The images included on *The wall of rock* represent historic as well as modern day events. The #ZumaMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns appear along with Pink Floyd on the work entitled *Another brick in the wall* (1979). In another work entitled *The people have the power*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu stands alongside the Dalai Lama, above them and in the centre of the canvas is Pravin Gordhan ex-minister of finance, to the right of him is Thuli Madonsela, South Africa’s previous Public Protector and at the apex of this altar-like composition is Patti Smith. In the 1960s, South Africa was perched on the brink of civil war, the ANC was deploying guerrilla warfare tactics, whilst Verwoerd was tightening the noose on the segregation between black and white people. The 1960s in South Africa commenced with the Sharpeville massacre and later in the decade saw Nelson Mandela amongst others sentenced to prison in the infamous Rivonia Trial.

It was at the Rivonia Trial (1964) that Nelson Mandela (in Sebag 2005:133) said: “The ANC has spent half a century fighting against racialism. When it triumphs it will not change that policy… I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities”. In 2017, South Africa under President Jacob Zuma appears to have thrown away these ideals.

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At the time of writing September/October 2017 North Korea and America are threatening one another with nuclear war, whilst in South Africa I conducted my study during the emerging #Fallist Culture which prevailed at this time.
4.5 Deconstructing/reconstructing

The cut-out speeches consist of heroes and their counterpart villains; seven of each. Each pair was chosen to represent a relative cause which has validity today. The heroes and villains are as follows:

- Winston Churchill – Adolf Hitler;
- Jawaharlal Nehru – Lord Mountbatten;
- Shirley Chisholm – Edgar Berman;\(^{39}\)
- Martin Luther King Jr. – George Wallace
- Nelson Mandela – Hendrik Verwoerd
- The Dalai Lama – Chairman Mao
- John Lennon – Richard Nixon

Each pair is linked to a general cause, for example, women’s rights, Segregation, the partition of India and Pakistan, free Tibet and Apartheid. Each person has a silkscreened image which speaks directly to the consequences relating to the speech. In Fig. 4.62, Winston Churchill is linked with the song *Hey Bulldog*, by The Beatles (1969). An image of The Beatles, holding the Yellow Submarine, on which album, *Hey Bulldog* was released, is therefore featured on the collage of images that have been silkscreened. Along with The Beatles there is an image from the film, *The Great Escape* (1963) featuring Steve McQueen (1930-1980), as well as a man waving the Union Jack and the European Union flags in tandem. In the bottom left corner of the work is a portrait of Boris Johnson. The issue is Brexit. The line from the song, which has been highlighted is: “You do not know what it’s like to listen to your fears”.

Across from this work, hangs Winston Churchill’s 1940 “We shall never surrender” speech, the overlay of synaesthetic blocks is a quote from this speech, which reads: “Then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by British fleet, would carry on the struggle…”.

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\(^{39}\) Although the image used is of Edgar Berman (1915-1987), who wrote *The Compleat Chauvinist: A Survival Guide for the Bedeviled Male* (1982), the speech itself is based on a letter written by Senator J. B. Sanford in 1911 against women’s rights.
The next print in the sequence *The wall of rock* (Fig. 4.27) includes an image of Aleppo, the city in Syria which was bombed beyond recognition in April of 2016, at the top of the canvas. Below this is a flood of people, the ‘illegal’ immigrants, streaming into another country to escape their own. In the bottom left-hand corner is the image of the Northern Ireland riots which occurred in 1969 and in 1972, led to what is known as Bloody Sunday or the Bogside Massacre. On the right-hand side is an image of the band The Small Faces, whose song *Lazy Sunday afternoon* (1968) accompanies the work with the highlighted lyric “Would not it be nice to get on with my neighbours”. Across from this work is the speech of Adolf Hitler made in 1938 where he states that “My patience is now at an end” (in Sebag 2005:79), with the extract from the speech reading: “…give to the Germans their freedom, or we will go and fetch this freedom for ourselves”.

Figure 4.26: Ilka van Schalkwyk. *Throwing stones: Paradoxical freedoms, Hey bulldog*, 2017. Guerrilla print 840x200mm
Figure 4.27: Ilka van Schalkwyk. *Throwing stones: Paradoxical freedoms, Lazy Sunday afternoon*, 2017. Guerrilla print, 840x1200mm

Each of the 14 images is composed in a similar fashion and each is linked with the speech across from it, see Fig. 4.28.
4.5.1. Constructing the work

In order to construct *The wall of rock*, I first created collages of the images I wanted to include on each guerrilla print. Once I was satisfied with the content and composition of the collage, I then created a stencil of the collage in order to create the large guerrilla prints. At the start of the process the collages included the corresponding lyric to the image, which later changed to include a picture of the band or musician, whilst the printed lyrics of the song have been placed around the outer edge of the work.
The collages juxtapose old and new images, as described in Fig. 4.29 above.

The artist’s book, which in many ways contextualises and orders the source materials for this exhibition, consists of 43 pages. The first page, as described earlier is the quote from Rushdie’s *Imaginary homelands*.
The next page is a digital print, on acetate paper, of the Winston Churchill cut-out speech. A quote from the speech has been masked by my blocks of colour, with the letters still visible. The next page, which remains visible through the speech page is a digital print titled Hey bulldog, the colour of the image is the RGB colour for my alphabet of colour, in this case, the colour for the letter T. Following this is a page of the same colour, the colour for T, but with the quote from the song colour-blocked onto the page see Fig. 4.30. From each colour-block, the corresponding letter has been hand-cut. This layout is continued for all 28 works, which serves to link the hero/villain with its counter print as well as the relevant quote of the speech and the song.

The issues were chosen to reflect the time we are living in now. Many heroes/villains such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro were left out. The decisions to include some and exclude others was determined by four highly personal requirements:

- Whether the hero/villain made a speech relating to freedom;
- Whether the issue pertains and relates to the times in which we live now;
- Whether a suitable lyric from a 1960s or 1970s song can be linked to the speech/issue; and
- It was imperative that there is a clear hero and villain, a double sided coin, to show the similarities and differences in the words and actions of both, underscoring the work’s subtitle.

I selected the chosen songs based on my knowledge of the lyrics and my belief that each song would provide an appropriate commentary on the chosen issue. Once the issues, speeches and images were chosen, the songs were then linked.

The wall of rock begins with the heroes, but halfway through the order switches and the villains are then in front of the heroes. This is done so that the viewer starts with a hero and ends with a hero. The hero at the end is John Lennon and, rather than a speech, the cut-out words are from the song Give peace a chance (1969): The idea being that my exhibition ends with a strong desire for peace.

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40 In the beginning of the decision making process I had a list of songs which I thought might be appropriate. Among them were Teenage wasteland (1971) and My generation (1965) by The Who as well as Locomotive breath (1971) by Jethro Tull to name a few.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have drawn attention to not only the condition of synaesthesia, but specifically how it manifests in artworks created by three selected synaesthetic artists. In neurological terms, the field of synaesthesia is still relatively new with the complex causalities of the condition still the subject of much debate. Due, however, to heightened awareness of synaesthesia through a growing number of published books, articles and medical studies appearing in the public domain within the last decade, many more people are realising and acknowledging that they might possess a type of synaesthesia. This has resulted in a wide range of synaesthetes who are willing to discuss and have their synaesthetic experiences and symptoms examined. This assists researchers in the field of synaesthesia to better understand the condition.

Through this research, I specifically wanted to draw attention to the creative manifestations of synaesthesia, particularly within the fine arts. The three artists I chose to discuss are still relatively unknown, but each uses his or her synaesthetic associations in a unique way, thus allowing the viewer a glimpse into the perceived reality of a synaesthete’s experience. In this study, then, I have argued for how the embodied synaesthetic experience manifests itself in creative expression.

McCracken demonstrates her sound-colour synaesthetic condition as particular landscape-like compositions, facilitating access to her synaesthetic perceptions by non-synaesthetes. Synaesthete and savant Tammet copes with the world in which he lives through his understanding of numbers as visual personalities. Harbisson, although still completely colour-blind and only able to see the world around him in grey scale, can, through the means of technologically-induced synaesthesia, hear colours, enriching his perception of the world and facilitating a rich body of artwork.

Through my analyses of these contemporary synaesthetic artists, I have provided a context for my own synaesthetic artworks. The theoretical frameworks of the phenomenological and the embodied have facilitated my creative process as a means of exploring themes of freedom and the other. Like my selected contemporary synaesthetic artists, I use my synaesthetic-based artworks to question and engage the world around me. Unlike McCracken, Tammet and Harbisson, however, my work is not only a representation of my synaesthetic perceptions, instead, I use my synaesthetic alphabet to question a failure to communicate which seems to occur on a daily basis. This failure in communication causes a breakdown in
any empathetic system, allowing for othering to occur. Such othering then restricts creative expression and results in a lack of freedom of expression.

The aim of the study was to showcase how synaesthesia manifests itself in selected artworks. By contextualising the synaesthetic experience and then analysing three contemporary synaesthetic artists, each with a different type of synaesthesia, as well as offering an analyses and exploration of my own synaesthetic artworks, I hope to have shed light on the condition and its artistic manifestations with specific foci, in my own work on overcoming othering and exploring personal freedoms.

Rushdie (1991:20) claims that: “Art is a passion of the mind. And the imagination works best when it is most free”. If we accept this statement as true, then research into the manifestations of synaesthesia created by the synaesthetic artist should become more prominent in the future, as the synaesthetic artist becomes a familiar part of the art world.

Outside of a purely academic context, it might be interesting to establish an online synaesthetic community in South Africa, where synaesthetes can discuss their similarities and differences. Another possibility is creating a synaesthetic artist community in South Africa, where synaesthetic artists can collaborate with one another and exhibit together.

In the academic world, there is still much to discover about synaesthesia; possible fields of study could include more research into different creative fields such as music and design with a particular focus on the work of synaesthetes in these respective fields.
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### APPENDIX A

Sean Day's comparative frequencies of different kinds of synaesthesia. (Data reproduced with permission from [http://home.comcast.net/~sean.day/html/types.htm](http://home.comcast.net/~sean.day/html/types.htm)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphemes → colours</td>
<td>66.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time units → colours</td>
<td>22.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical sounds → colours</td>
<td>18.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General sounds → colours</td>
<td>14.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemes → colours</td>
<td>9.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical notes → colours</td>
<td>9.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smells → colours</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tastes → colours</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound → tastes</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain → colours</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities → colours</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch → colours</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound → touch</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperatures → colours</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision → tastes</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds → smells</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision → sounds</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orgasm → colours</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions → colours</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision → smells</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision → touch</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smells → touch</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch → tastes</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smells → sounds</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds → kinetics</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound → temperatures</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tastes → touch</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinetics → sounds</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities → smells</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>Probability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch → sounds</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch → smell</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision → temperatures</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical notes → tastes</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities → touch</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smells → tastes</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smells → temperatures</td>
<td>0.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tastes → sounds</td>
<td>0.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tastes → temperatures</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperatures → sounds</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch → temperatures</td>
<td>0.10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX B

## Timeline of the 1960s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RSA</th>
<th>1960</th>
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</thead>
</table>
|     | • Sharpeville Massacre.  
|     | • The United Nations Security Council, in its first action on South Africa, adopts Resolution 134 (1960) deploving the policies and actions of the South African Government which have given rise to the loss of life of so many Africans and have led to international friction.  
|     | UK Prime Minister Harold Macmillan makes his so-called "Wind of Change" speech to the South African Parliament in Cape Town, where it attracts attention. (It was drafted by David Hunt). |
|     | 1961 |
|     | • Desmond Tutu becomes a minister in the Anglican Church.  
|     | • Following strong opposition in the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd announces the withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth "in the interests of South Africa's honour and dignity".  
|     | • The All-in African Conference is held in Pietermaritzburg and is attended by 1 400 delegates representing 145 religious, cultural, peasant, intellectual and political bodies. The conference calls for a national convention of elected representatives. The conference also elects Nelson Mandela as secretary of the National Action Council.  
|     | • Robben Island is turned into a prison for those convicted of political crimes.  
|     | • South Africa becomes a republic and the country’s membership of the Commonwealth simultaneously expires. A nation-wide strike is held in protest against the establishment of the Republic of South Africa.  
|     | • South African holds its first (Whites only) general election since becoming a Republic. The National Party (NP) wins the majority of seats, with 67% of seats, followed by the United Party, with 31%.  
|     | • uMkhonto weSizwe (MK, ‘The spear of the nation’), the armed wing of the ANC, announces its existence through a series of bomb blasts against apartheid structures in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban. One of its aims was to "hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom". |
|     | 1962 |
|     | • Nelson Mandela returns to South Africa and travels to Stanger, Natal to meet with Chief Albert Luthuli who was banned at the time.  
|     | • Nelson Mandela is sentenced to five years in prison for
- Incitement and illegally leaving the country.
  - Chief Albert Luthuli and Dr Martin Luther King Jnr issue a joint statement ‘Appeal for Action Against Apartheid’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1963</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Transkei is separated from the Cape Province. Prime Minister Dr Hendrik Verwoerd declares that the Transkei is to become a self-governing state, and that this will follow for other homelands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albertina Sisulu becomes the first woman to be arrested under the General Laws Amendment Act and is held in solitary confinement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting on information provided by Gerard Ludi, police raided Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia, Johannesburg. Virtually the entire leadership of the MK – Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Ahmed Kathrada, Lionel Bernstein and Bob Hepple – is arrested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 11 accused, including those arrested at Liliesleaf Farm, are brought to court in what becomes known as the Rivonia Trial. While serving his five year sentence, Nelson Mandela is also charged in the Rivonia Trial. The offences alleged are: (1) recruiting persons for training in the preparation and use of explosives and in guerrilla warfare for the purpose of violent revolution and committing acts of sabotage; (2) conspiring to commit the aforementioned acts and to aid foreign military units when they invaded the Republic; (3) acting in these ways to further the objects of communism; and (4) soliciting and receiving money for these purposes from sympathisers in Algeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Tunisia and elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1964</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As part of the defense opens its case Nelson Mandela makes the iconic speech which begins with the statement, “I am prepared to die”, from the dock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rivonia Trial ends. Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba and Denis Goldberg are found guilty on all four charges and sentenced to life imprisonment. Ahmed Kathrada is found guilty on one charge of conspiracy while Lionel Bernstein is found not guilty. He is later rearrested, released on bail, and placed under house arrest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa is banned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from the Tokyo Olympic Games after refusing to abandon apartheid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa is expelled from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bram Fischer Trial opens in the Johannesburg Regional Court. Along with Bram Fischer, 13 others are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
charged including Ivan Schermbrucher, Eli Weinberg, Esther Barsel, Norman Levy, Lewis Baker, Ken Strachan, Ann Nicholson, Constantinos Gazides, Paul Trewhela, Sylvia Neame, Florence Duncan, Mollie Doyle and Hymie Barsel. It is after the testimony of Piet Beyleveld, a comrade who had turned state witness, and Gerard Ludi, a spy who infiltrated the SACP, that Bram Fischer calls the reconstituted SACP central committee together to discuss his going underground.

| 1965 | • South Africa is excluded from the International Civil Aviation and from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).  
• Bram Fischer goes underground to a farm in Rustenburg where he becomes a Mr Douglas Black. A massive countrywide search begins for the *Rooi Pimpernel*, as he is dubbed.  
• After 70 hours of interrogation, Violet Weinberg gives the Special Branch information on the whereabouts of Bram Fischer. Fischer is arrested at his home in Bramley after 294 days underground and is taken first to Pretoria Central then to Pretoria Local Prison. |
| 1966 | • Chris Hani is moved to Zambia where he is responsible for setting up a joint training programme with ZAPU before their entry into Rhodesia in what would later become the known as the Wankie campaign. While trying to re-enter Botswana, Hani is arrested and detained for two weeks before being sent back to Lusaka.  
• District Six is declared a “Whites-only” area by the government and forced removals begin for over 50 000 residents.  
• Bram Fischer’s trial begins in the central court of the Palace of Justice in Pretoria in front of Mr Justice Wessel Boshoff. Fischer’s defence is led by Sydney Kentridge. Fischer pleads not guilty to 15 charges, ranging from sabotage, being a member of the SACP and participating in its activities to fraud.  
• Fischer is sentenced to life in prison on the count of sabotage; to 24 years on the six charges under the Suppression of Communism Act; to fines totalling R120 (or six months in prison) for six contraventions of the Aliens Act and to three months on the two counts of forgery. All the terms are to run concurrently. Fischer decides not to appeal.  
• Prime Minister Dr Hendrik Verwoerd is stabbed in the neck and chest by Dimitri Tsaftendas. Verwoerd is rushed to the Groote Schuur Hospital, but is declared dead on arrival. |
<p>| 1967 | • The Defence Amendment Act makes military service |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1968 | The ANC issues a pamphlet entitled “We are at War!”  
Steve Biko attends a NUSAS conference at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. He is deeply offended by the segregation of student accommodation and decides to break with NUSAS and form an all-black student union, the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO). |
| 1969 | The ANC opens its membership to include White people. Jack Simons and Ray Alexander Simons are amongst the first White people to become members of the ANC.  
Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is placed in solitary confinement at Pretoria Central Prison for 17 months under the Terrorism Act. |
| USA | 1960 | Birth control pill approved.  
Anti-Segregation movement begins with a sit-in. |
| 1961 | Peace Corps founded. |
| 1962 | The Cuban Missile Crisis.  
Andy Warhol prints the Campbell’s Soup Tin.  
Chief Albert Luthuli and Dr Martin Luther King Jnr issue a joint statement ‘Appeal for Action Against Apartheid’.  
Live television broadcast from the USA to Britain for the first time, via the Telstar communications satellite and Goonhilly Satellite Earth Station. |
| 1963 | Assassination of US President John F Kennedy.  
March on Washington.  
Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream speech”. |
| 1964 | The Beatles tour America.  
Civil Rights Act becomes law. |
| 1965 | US President Lyndon B Johnson sends troops into Vietnam.  
Malcolm X assassinated. |
<p>| 1966 | Black Panther Party founded. |
| 1968 | Martin Luther King Jr assassination. |
| 1969 | Woodstock music festival. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK &amp; Northern Ireland</th>
<th>1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• First man on the moon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Manson Family killed five at the home of director Roman Polanski in Benedict Canyon near Hollywood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) is formed in Britain with the re-naming of the Boycott Movement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan makes the &quot;Wind of Change&quot; speech for the first time, to little publicity, in Accra, Gold Coast – now Ghana.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 60,000 protestors stage a demonstration in London against nuclear weapons.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Beatles, a five-strong male band from Liverpool, perform their first concert under this name in Hamburg, West Germany.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Queen launches Britain's first nuclear submarine, HMS <em>Dreadnought</em>, at Barrow-in-Furness.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1961</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Police break up a demonstration outside the Belgian embassy in London protesting about the murder of the ex-Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Patrice Lumumba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The five members of the Portland Spy Ring go on trial at the Old Bailey accused of passing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Beatles perform at the legendary Cavern Club in Liverpool for the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• George Blake is sentenced to 42 years imprisonment for spying, having been found guilty of being a double agent in the pay of the Soviet Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Police arrest over 1,300 protesters in Trafalgar Square during a CND rally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Birth control pills become available on the National Health Service after their availability is backed by Health Minister Enoch Powell.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1962</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The Irish Republican Army officially calls off its Border Campaign in Northern Ireland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Orpington by-election, often described as the start of the Liberal Party revival in the UK, has Liberal Eric Lubbock upsetting the expected winner, Conservative candidate Peter Goldman for the seat in Orpington.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Beatles play their first session at Abbey Road Studios.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commonwealth Immigrants Act in the United Kingdom removes free immigration from the citizens of member states of the Commonwealth of Nations, requiring proof of employment in the UK. This comes into effect on 1 July.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Live television broadcast from the USA to Britain for the
first time, via the Telstar communications satellite and Goonhilly Satellite Earth Station.

- The Rolling Stones makes its debut at London's Marquee Club, Number 165 Oxford Street, opening for Long John Baldry.
- In what the press dubs "the Night of the Long Knives", the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan dismisses one-third of his Cabinet.
- Race riots break out in Dudley, West Midlands.
- *Dr No*, the first James Bond film, is premiered at the London Pavilion, with 32-year-old Edinburgh-born Sean Connery playing the lead, a British Secret Service agent.
- The Beatles's first single in their own right, *Love Me Do*, is released by Parlophone. This version was recorded on 4 September at Abbey Road Studios in London with Ringo Starr as drummer.

### 1963

- The Great Train Robbery.
- Charles de Gaulle, President of France, vetoes the UK's entry into the European Economic Community.
- Polaris Sales Agreement with the United States, leading to commencement of construction of nuclear submarine facilities at Faslane Naval Base.
- 70,000 protesters arrive in London; they have marched all the way from Aldermarston to demonstrate against nuclear weapons.
- The Beatles release their debut album, *Please Please Me*.
- Profumo Affair: John Profumo, British Secretary of State for War, admits to misleading Parliament and resigns over his affair with Christine Keeler.

### 1964

- The Beatles tours America; The British invasion begins.
- The British and French governments agree to a deal for the construction of a Channel Tunnel. The twin-tunnelled rail link is expected to take five years to build.
- "Pirate" radio station Radio Caroline begins regular broadcasting from a ship anchored just outside UK territorial waters off Felixstowe.
- Violent disturbances between Mods and Rockers at Clacton beach.
- Winston Churchill retires from the House of Commons at the age of 89.
- Release of London group the Kinks's successful single *You Really Got Me*, written by Ray Davies.

### 1965

- The Rolling Stones releases (*I can not get no*) *Satisfaction*
- The Prime Ministers of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland meet for the first time in 43 years.
- Churchill dies aged 90 at Chartwell, his Kent home of more than 40 years.
- Elizabeth Lane appointed as the first female High Court judge, assigned to the Family Division.
- The Race Relations Act outlaws public racial discrimination.
- President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia announces that Zambia and the United Kingdom have agreed to a deadline before which the Rhodesian white minority-rule government should be ousted.
- Mary Quant introduces the miniskirt from her shop *Bazaar* on the Kings Road in Chelsea, London.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1966 | United Kingdom ceases all trade with Rhodesia.  
|      | Britain protests to South Africa over its supplying of petrol to Rhodesia.  
|      | 31 arrests are made after a protest against the Vietnam War outside the US embassy turns violent.  
|      | The Bechuanaland Protectorate in Africa achieves independence from the UK as Botswana.  
|      | Spain demands that the United Kingdom stop military flights to Gibraltar – Britain says "no" the next day.  
|      | Spain closes its Gibraltar border against vehicular traffic.  
|      | 5 November – 38 African states demand that the United Kingdom use force against Rhodesian government. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1967 | Police raid "Redlands", the Sussex home of Rolling Stones musician Keith Richards, following a tip-off from the *News of the World*. No immediate arrests are made, but Richards, fellow band member Mick Jagger and art dealer Robert Fraser are later charged with possession of drugs.  
|      | At the Finsbury Park Astoria, London, Jimi Hendrix sets fire to his guitar on stage for the first time. He is taken to hospital suffering burns to his hands.  
|      | The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland officially apply for European Economic Community membership.  
|      | 'Barbeque 67', a music festival, at the Tulip Bulb Auction Hall, Spalding, features Jimi Hendrix, Cream, Pink Floyd and Zoot Money.  
|      | The Beatles release *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, one of Rock music's most acclaimed and influential albums.  
|      | Parliament decriminalises private acts of consensual adult male homosexuality in England and Wales with the Sexual Offences Act.  
|      | The Marine, &c., Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967 declares participation in offshore pirate radio in the United Kingdom illegal. Wonderful Radio London broadcast from MV *Galaxy* off the Essex coast for the
last time.
- Prime Minister Harold Wilson wins a libel action against Rock band *The Move* in the High Court after they depict him in the nude in promotional material for their record *Flowers in the Rain.*
- BBC Radio completely restructures its national programming: the Light Programme is split between new national pop station Radio 1 (modelled on the successful pirate station Radio London) and Radio 2; the cultural Third Programme is rebranded Radio 3; and the primarily-talk Home Service becomes Radio 4.

The Abortion Act, passed in Parliament, legalising abortion on a number of grounds (with effect from 1968).

1968

- Commonwealth Immigrants Act further reduces the right of entry for citizens from the British Commonwealth to the UK.
- First performance of an Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in its original form as a "pop cantata", by pupils of Colet Court preparatory school in Hammersmith.
- Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, endorses the “I’m Backing Britain” campaign, encouraging workers to work extra time without pay or take other actions to help competitiveness, which is spreading across Britain.
- A demonstration in London's Grosvenor Square against US involvement in the Vietnam War leads to violence – 91 police are injured, 200 demonstrators are arrested.
- Enoch Powell makes his controversial “Rivers of Blood” speech on immigration.
- 21 April – Powell is dismissed from the Shadow Cabinet by Opposition leader Edward Heath due to the “Rivers of Blood” speech, despite several opinion polls stating that the majority of the public shares Powell's fears.
- The Abortion Act of 1967 comes into effect, legalising abortion on a number of grounds, with free provision through the National Health Service.
- Theatres Act ends censorship of the theatre.
- 27 September – the US musical *Hair* opens in London following the removal of theatre censorship.
- A civil rights march in Derry, Northern Ireland, which includes several Stormont and British MPs, is batoned off the streets by the Royal Ulster Constabulary.
- The Race Relations Act is passed, making it illegal to refuse housing, employment or public services to people in Britain because of their ethnic background.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1969 | - Derry riots leave over 100 people injured.  
      - Protestors in Northern Ireland defy police orders to abandon a planned march.  
      - Violent protests by students about the installation of steel security gates, close the London School of Economics, which does not reopen for a further three weeks.  
      - The Beatles performs for the final time, on the rooftop of Apple Records. The impromptu concert is broken up by the police.  
      - Representation of the People Act lowers the voting age from 21 to 18 with effect from February 1970. It also permits candidates to have a party label included on the ballot paper, and removes the right (theoretically restored in 1967) of convicted prisoners to vote in Parliamentary elections.  
      - Sikh busmen in Wolverhampton win the right to wear their turbans on duty.  
      - British troops arrived in Northern Ireland to reinforce the Royal Ulster Constabulary.  
      - Two members of the Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (Movement for the Defence of Wales) are killed while placing a bomb outside government offices in Abergele in an attempt to disrupt the following day's events.  
      - Rioting breaks out in Derry, Northern Ireland in the Battle of the Bogside, the first major confrontation of The Troubles.  
      - 13–17 August – Sectarian rioting in Northern Ireland.  
      - 13 August – The Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, Jack Lynch, makes a speech on Teilifís Éireann saying that his government "can no longer stand by" and requests a United Nations peacekeeping force for Northern Ireland.  
      - 14 August – British troops are deployed in Northern Ireland to restore law and order.  
      - 30–31 August – the second Isle of Wight Festival attracts 150,000 pop music fans, with the appearance of Bob Dylan a major draw.  
      - The Beatles releases what would be it final album (*Abbey Road*) recorded together.  
      - The government accepts the recommendations of Lord Hunt's report on policing in Northern Ireland including the abolition of the Ulster Special Constabulary.  
      - John Lennon returns his MBE to protest against the British government's involvement in Biafra and support of the US war in Vietnam. |
<p>| 1960 | - State of emergency is lifted in Kenya – the Mau Mau Uprising is officially over. |</p>
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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| 1961 | - Nigeria gains its independence from the United Kingdom.  
- Cyprus gains its independence from the United Kingdom.  
- British Somaliland gains independence from the United Kingdom; five days later it unites with the former Italian Somaliland to create the modern Somali Republic. |
| 1962 | - The Berlin wall is constructed.  
- Soviets launch first man into space.  
- Sierra Leone gains independence from the UK.  
- Peter Benenson's article "The Forgotten Prisoners" is published in several internationally read newspapers. This will later be thought of as the founding of the human rights organisation Amnesty International. |
| 1963 | - 12 European countries form the European Space Agency.  
- The United States, United Kingdom and Soviet Union sign a nuclear test ban treaty. |
| 1964 | - Mao Zedong launches the Cultural Revolution in China.  
- As a result of the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the United Nations General Assembly declares this day “International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination”.  
- Botswana gains independence from Britain.  
- Lesotho gains independence from Britain and a constitutional monarchy is established. |
| 1965 | - The Australian prime minister disappears.  
- Che Guevara is killed.  
- The Middle East witnesses the Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.  
- Joseph Stalin's daughter defects to the US.  
- British troops and Chinese demonstrators clash on the border of China and Hong Kong during the Hong Kong Riots.  
- British troops leave Aden, which they have occupied since 1839, enabling the formation of the new republic of Yemen.  
- The Concorde supersonic aircraft is unveiled in Toulouse, France. |
| 1966 | - The My Lai massacre and the Tet Offensive |
| 1967 | - Yasser Arafat becomes the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.  
- The maiden flight of Concorde takes place. |
| 1968 | |