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**Nietzsche's Synaesthetic Epistemology & the  
Restitution of the Holistic Human**

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*[The heart] nourished in seas of blood which leaps back and forth, and there especially it is called understanding by men; for men's understanding is blood around the heart.—Empedocles, §96/105*

In opposition to the orthodox philosophic, religious, and aesthetic conception of the senses, in Nietzsche's epistemic order, every sense is not only positively valued but also often "crossed" with other senses. If three of the just four scholars who actually address Nietzsche's conception of synaesthesia assert that his depiction and use of it is strictly metaphoric, in fact, it is often if not as a rule precisely the opposite—the phenomenon is conveyed as real. Nietzsche was knowledgeable of synaesthesia through medical, aesthetic, and philosophic sources and a persistent engagement with it can be traced throughout his corpus. Further, his interest in synaesthesia may signal that he himself was synaesthetically inclined. If that cannot be definitively ascertained, aside from the testimony of his philosophy, several intriguing allusions in letters indicate that he may have had experiential knowledge of the phenomenon. Whatever the case, as an experimental mode of epistemology, Nietzsche was sensitive to it and, as will be illustrated, considered it a phenomenon demanding serious attention.

In counseling us to develop our synaesthetic potentiality, I propose that Nietzsche is recuperating an ancient praxis and advancing a *sense-oriented epistemology* in order to refine and intensify our attunement to the world. It is the cultivation of a new mode of "common sense" (in Greek, *Koinê aesthêsis*, in Latin, *sensus communis*) completely different than Kant's and that of orthodox philosophy—data received via the sensory domain is not condemned or abnegated. In Nietzsche's *Umwertung aller Werte*, the mode for obtaining knowledge is no longer reason alone—it will also be obtained through a meditative praxis that engages the entire body, which

Nietzsche refers to as “a great reason” and “a manifold with one sense” (Z: I, 4; KSA IV, 39), presaging the view in contemporary synaesthetic literature that we do not have five sense organs but one sense organ with five sub-organs.<sup>1</sup> A particularly rich concentration of the synaesthetic figures in his magnum opus, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, with Zarathustra and the *Übermensch* representing holistic types who not only embrace the senses as well as reason as means for acquiring knowledge, but more important, *unite* both as the ultimate epistemological tool. In what follows, I will trace the synaesthetic in Nietzsche’s corpus, focusing most on *Zarathustra*, and briefly address the question of Nietzsche being synaesthetic, then conclude with an outline of Nietzsche’s constellation of the sensory order and explain how comprehending the *Übermensch* demands activating our synaesthetic capacity.

## Synaesthesia in Nietzsche’s Corpus

All that philosophers have been handling for thousands of years is conceptual mummies; nothing real has ever left their hands alive.—Nietzsche, TI: “Reason” §1; KSA VI, 74

One of the earliest instances of Nietzsche’s positive valuation of the senses and of his awareness that they were once all united is in his 1870 essay “Das griechische Musikdrama.” There, Nietzsche critiques the common aesthetic axiom that the union of two or more arts is indicative of “a barbarous aberration of taste.” What this axiom actually betrays is the modern bad habit of lacking the ability to enjoy things with all of our faculties: “we find ourselves torn to pieces, so to speak, by absolute artistic experience, and indeed we can no longer enjoy anything except as parts of ourselves, now as earmen, now as eyemen, etc. Let us contrast that with the image of ancient drama as total art form” (KSA I, 518). Aside from its synaesthetic view of perception, this passage is also intriguing because it foreshadows the critique of specialization Nietzsche makes 23 years later in *Zarathustra*. The giant ear with an emaciated stalk of a body is thought by others to be a genius but for Zarathustra, it is nothing but an inverse cripple (Z: II, 20; KSA IV, 178). Instead of cultivating the ability to unite all of the senses, we sever our bodies into pieces and augment and expand the separate parts, convincing ourselves that we are geniuses through inflating those individual fragments. From the very beginning, Nietzsche’s thought is grounded in a conviction in the centrality of the body, of the total body as holistic anchor of human experience.

In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche criticizes Parmenides for precisely the kind of abnegation and fragmentation of the body Zarathustra derides. Since Parmenides observed with his senses a world of becoming, he condemned his eyes and ears for what they recognized, refusing to accept his observations as epistemologically valid. Due to this, Parmenides warns us against being guided by the senses of sight, hearing, and taste. Instead, we should trust in the power of thinking alone. For Nietzsche, this is the first and most dire critique of man’s apparatus of knowledge, by which he implies the body and the mind operating in unison. “By wrenching apart the senses and the capacity for abstraction, in other words by splitting up mind as though it were composed of two quite separate capacities, he demolished intellect itself, encouraging man to indulge in that wholly erroneous distinction between

‘spirit’ and ‘body’ which, especially since Plato, lies upon philosophy like a curse” (§10; KSA I, 843). Nietzsche declares further that “the absolute separation of senses and concepts” is a falsehood (§13; KSA I, 850), precisely the kind of Platonic-Christian moral division of the body and mind that leads to barbarism. As with Socrates, the figure of Parmenides haunts Western thought and is one of the opponents in Nietzsche’s agonistic ring. Whether his assessment of Parmenides is accurate or not is here inconsequential.<sup>2</sup> What we already begin to see through these passages is a continuity of thought that Nietzsche will sustain until the end of his writing life regarding the senses and the body.

In the 1886 preface to *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche constitutes the book not merely as a text but as a *musical artifact* when declaring that it “must be capable of some kind of music and flute-player’s art by which even coy foreign ears are seduced to listen [. . .]” (§8; KSA II, 22).<sup>3</sup> Thus, “understanding” the book demands more than reading it with one’s eyes alone—it must also be heard with the eyes or ears, yet the book has not only “been read most carelessly,” but, more crucial Nietzsche emphasizes, it has been “*heard* the worst.” To truly comprehend it then requires becoming *Übermenschlich*, that is, it requires “refined and experienced senses” (*Ibid.*). As Nietzsche diagnoses later in the book though, our senses have become blunted and our ears are no longer capable of hearing fine distinctions, such as between C# and Db. “In this matter,” Nietzsche believes, assessing the cultural climate of his time, “our ears have become coarser” (§217; KSA II, 177).<sup>4</sup> Now, over 100 years on, our senses may be even more blunted. As Wordsworth diagnosed, presaging Nietzsche’s critique of decadence by half a century, it is urbanization, which includes a loss of the rich sensory contact with the natural world, that in part blunts “the discriminating powers of the mind, [. . .] unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor.”<sup>5</sup> Due to coarseness or barbarity, we intellectualize the senses, too, and this intellectualization of the senses is one of the consequences of the Parmenidean-Platonic-Christian derision of the body. It results in an enervating of the perceptual faculties, the rationalization of joy, and the supplanting of the real. “The more the eye and ear are capable of thought the more they reach that boundary line where they become unsensual. Joy is transferred to the brain; the sense organs themselves become dull and weak. More and more, the symbolic replaces that which exists—and so, as surely as on any other path, we arrive along this one at barbarism” (§217; KSA II, 177). The necessity of coupling the perceptual and the rational faculties is exemplified in another aphorism where Nietzsche imbues the thinking organ with the attributes of the feeling one when conceiving of a double-brain with two *brain-ventricles* for the perceptions of science and non-science (§251; KSA II, 209).<sup>6</sup> This provocative image, of a brain with throbbing chambers that pulsate, of an organ of cognition that requires blood to function, is emblematic of Nietzsche’s radical epistemological concept and it will receive a significant transformation in *Zarathustra*. It can function as a powerful guiding image for contemplating Nietzsche’s synaesthetic epistemology. Let us sustain it in our imagination during this meditation.

In *Daybreak*, there is a similar demand for special readers, for readers with keen ears and delicate eyes and fingers, for readers capable of becoming still and slow, or of deeply ruminating like the cud-chewing cow Nietzsche admires. In positing that our senses may even have had different functions, too, and in exploring that possibility, it is

clear that for him synaesthesia is not merely metaphoric. When discussing the history of the eye Nietzsche claims that after demonstrating its evolution, one “must arrive at the great conclusion that vision was *not* the intention behind the creation of the eye” (§122; KSA III, 115).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in the *Gay Science*, he explicitly declares that our eyes had a completely different function; “our eyes,” he pronounces, “are also intended for hearing” (§223; KSA III, 510).<sup>8</sup> Whereas in general Nietzsche positively values the senses, in *Daybreak*, as throughout his corpus, there is a persistent emphasis on feeling and its importance, of the primacy feeling has over thought in life. This further reinforces the centrality of the body, of the nerves in Nietzsche’s philosophical vision, a vision that one could say is in part neurologically based, though this never descends into mere positivism or biologism—body for Nietzsche is a fluid, amorphous entity. Thoughts Nietzsche asserts are but “the shadows of our feelings—always darker, emptier, and simpler” (GS §179; KSA III, 502).<sup>9</sup> And when discussing two different kinds of deniers of morality and avoiding and resisting what would be considered “immoral” acts versus doing and encouraging “moral” acts, Nietzsche stresses that “the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto*. We have to *learn to think differently*—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*” (§103; KSA III, 91). Here, in this hierarchy, feeling is valued higher than thinking. If in his later work he may have a different view of morality, the centrality of feeling remains consistent throughout. Consciousness itself, or our “so-called consciousness” as Nietzsche says, is also “a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text” (§119; KSA III, 111). Conceiving of the world as a text is a prevailing if not now even mundane aspect of post-modern thought, but, tellingly, what the post-modern appropriation of Nietzsche’s view neglects is its sensory nuance—it is, as he differentiates, a *felt* text, perhaps akin to Braille texts which the blind “see” with their fingers.<sup>10</sup> The world is not something that we read as the text-centric insist, but *sense*, and to sense it requires possessing “subtle eyes, ears and noses” as well as a degree of inventiveness and an imagination “*unchained* by acuteness and knowledge” (§428; KSA III, 264).

In the preface to the second edition of the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche begins with a warning to the reader: to understand the book requires having *lived* through similar experiences.<sup>11</sup> Reading alone—that is, rational comprehension—will not yield its secrets or enable the reader to fathom its knowledge. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche repeats this warning when stating that if one has no access to something from experience, one will have no “ear” for it (*EH*: “Books” §1; KSA VI, 300). As Bertram notes, subsequent to beholding the Eleusian mysteries, Aristotle “says the same thing when he reports that this act of beholding is a *παθεῖν*, an ‘experiencing,’ not a *μαθεῖν*, a ‘learning.’ ” And, Bertram continues, it is as an Eleusian mystagogue, “as a great educator of secrecy through secrets, that Nietzsche embraces this Aristotelian *παθεῖν* as the highest form of all fruitful learning and ‘knowledge’ [. . .]”<sup>12</sup> Beyond that, the hermit of Sils Maria asserts that the book “seems to be written in the language of the wind that thaws ice and snow: high spirits, unrest, contradiction, and April weather are present in it” (P §1; KSA III, 345). Thus, Nietzsche endows this work with a sensorial and meteorological dimension and, as is well known, posits that philosophy has been nothing but “an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*” (P §2; KSA III, 348). Thinking itself is *bodily* and the philosopher “simply *cannot* keep from transposing his states every time

into the most spiritual form and distance: this art of transfiguration *is* philosophy. We philosophers are not free to divide body from soul as the people do; we are even less free to divide soul from spirit. We are not thinking frogs, nor objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards removed” (P §3; KSA III, 349). Earlier, Nietzsche makes an analogous assertion when claiming that nature mystifies and confines us “in a proud, deceptive consciousness, aloof from the coils of the bowels, the rapid flow of the blood stream, and the intricate quivering of the fibers!”<sup>13</sup> Later, he will pronounce in “On Immaculate Perception” that our entrails are what is strongest in us, and in the opening of the book he makes the even more intriguing assertion that the head is simply the entrails of the heart (Z: P §5; KSA IV, 18), a clear inversion of the orthodox hierarchy of the body. Further, if we do not “hold on to our hearts,” according to Zarathustra, we can also lose our heads (Z: II, 3; KSA IV, 115). In this, it is the heart, classically the feeling or emotive organ, that is the guiding or predominant force of the body. Parkes does not observe this in the footnotes to his translation, but Nietzsche may very well be evoking Empedocles’ thought that the blood around the heart is the thought of the human.<sup>14</sup>

There is a bodily or sensorial dimension to the death of God (GS §125; KSA III, 480), too, and it is emblematic of Nietzsche’s sensory orientation. While the sacrifice of God causes us to feel the breath of empty space and the temperature of the world grows more frigid, the madman asks if we can hear the noise of the gravediggers burying God and if we smell the divine decomposition. The act of murdering God also results in our being saturated with blood so that we need to be cleansed. In the closing passage, the madman explains that the tremendous event has not yet reached the *ears* of men and that it is a deed that requires time to be *seen* and *heard*. Thus, Nietzsche imbues his dramatization of the sacrificial murder of God with a striking and powerful sensory dimension as opposed to demonstrating that “God” is a conceptual construct and not an actual or metaphysical entity. When speaking of the event of the death of God later in the book, Nietzsche construes it visually and speaks of it as a spectacle that only those “whose eyes, the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some suns seem to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt: to them our old world must appear daily more like evening, more mistrustful, stranger, ‘older’ ” (GS §343; KSA III, 573). Also, when Zarathustra speaks of God dying, he notes that God offended “the taste of [his] ears and eyes . . .” (Z: IV, 6; KSA IV, 324). As a philosopher of the present and the future who has unlearned the fear of the senses, the sensorial dimension of events is an instrumental aspect of earthly life for today, all such philosophers “are believers in the senses,” and “*not* in theory but in *praxis*” (§372; KSA III, 623).<sup>15</sup>

If some of Nietzsche’s positions regarding the development of the sensory organs are understood as merely straightforward utilizations of 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionary arguments, as recent neuroscience research has proven, synaesthetic perceptions “are actual perceptions and, as such, clearly distinguishable from metaphorical associations or hallucinations.”<sup>16</sup> Further, and more appositely, basing the classification of the senses strictly on the visual organs is essentially crude for those largely external structures are not the sole mediums of sense experience. The process of vision for instance includes numerous body structures that include the eye itself, nerves, and different areas of the brain. Thus, as Cretien van Campen explains, the “division of sensory experience on the basis of physical external characteristics (eyes, nose, etc.) into five sensory

domains is somewhat misleading [. . .] [Various] sense researchers stress that the senses cannot be isolated but should be considered and understood in their relationships to one another [. . .]”<sup>17</sup> According to Greta Berman, “we all possess ‘relative synaesthesia,’ which, like relative pitch (and unlike perfect pitch), can be developed,” and Nietzsche seems to have understood this as he compels us to cultivate the ability, which is part of his project of reinstituting the holistic human, the human who embraces its animal nature. “When technically discussing the phenomenon of synaesthesia,” Berman asserts, “we should be dealing with the senses not as metaphors, but as separate and distinct realities” (16).

### **Synaesthesia in *Zarathustra***

In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche frequently implies that Zarathustra’s teaching can only be comprehended via the senses. When after first presenting his teaching and it is not understood, Zarathustra observes that he is still distant from human beings, suggesting that he is possibly not human but *Übermensch*. That is to say, he possesses qualities or abilities that the average human does not or has not yet cultivated. More pertinent, and this is an illuminating passage, perhaps one of the most instructive regarding Nietzsche’s synaesthetic epistemology, Zarathustra realizes that his “sense does not speak to [the] senses” (“*Aber noch bin ich ihnen ferne, und mein Sinn redet nicht zu ihren Sinnen*”) of those he addressed (Z: P §7; KSA IV, 23), clearly indicating that it is *through the senses themselves* that one will come to “understand” his teaching in its fullest dimension. In another passage, he asks his disciples if they are the *commanders* of their senses (Z: I, 20; KSA IV, 90), accentuating the necessity of controlling the senses as opposed to passively receiving perceptions.<sup>18</sup> Since the *Übermensch* is not spoken of in conceptual terms but in strictly material or sensorial ones—it is the sense of the earth, it is the sea, it is lightning, and earth and animal and plant are to be prepared for its sake (Z: P §4; KSA IV, 17) just as there is a rainbow that leads to the *Übermensch* (Z: P §9; KSA IV, 26), it is definitively not something that can be comprehended via cognition alone, but requires the attention of the entire body. And if it “comes to” Zarathustra as a specter (Z: I, 16; KSA IV, 35) and a shadow that is “still” and “light” (Z: II, 2; KSA IV, 112), to continue to grapple with the *Übermensch* from a strictly cognitive position is to refuse to encounter the figure as Nietzsche intimates it needs to be encountered, to refuse to cultivate the precisely singular epistemological mode necessary to *sense* the *Übermensch*.

As is often remarked, it is not that Zarathustra is a failure as a teacher or that his teaching is inadequate, for clearly, it is effective, but that those who have struggled to receive his teaching lack the abilities necessary to receive and animate it. If Zarathustra is synaesthetic, as all synaesthetes, not only would he consider his own perceptions to be normal, he might not even be aware that others lack his innate abilities. It might not be too bold to speculate that Nietzsche designed the text to illustrate that Zarathustra’s teaching can be fully grasped only synaesthetically. As he says in the preface to the *Gay Science*, if one hasn’t had similar experiences to those elucidated in the book, it is doubtful if prefaces alone, that is, instructive intellectual guidance, will bring one closer to such experiences. What is necessary is *experience, sensing with the entire body*

what the book expresses, for the book is a metaphor of bodily experiences, a series of nerve stimuli that have been transformed into images and the reader must activate them bodily to regenerate their sensuous power.<sup>19</sup>

Immediately subsequent to the very first presentation of his teaching, Zarathustra realizes that he is not understood and then wonders, “Must one first smash their ears before they learn to hear with their eyes?” (*Muss man ihnen erst die Ohren zerschlagen, dass sie lernen, mit den Augen hören?*) (Z: P §5; KSA IV, 18) This is another deeply illuminating passage that demands a different stress and focus. The task of hearing with one’s eyes is not metaphoric and recurs throughout the narrative, most dramatically when Zarathustra commands his abyss-deep thought to rise up and to *hear* with its eyes, which it achieves, as do other synaesthetic tasks, events, episodes, and entities. Zarathustra proclaims that he is able to listen to trees (Z: P §5; KSA IV, 20), that he can shut and open his ears as if they were eyes (Z: II, 6 and *passim*; KSA IV, 125), that he can hear the eye of Life speaking (Z: II, 12; KSA IV, 147),<sup>20</sup> that he can hear the stillest hour speaking without voice (Z: II, 22; KSA IV, 187), that he can see and smell spirit (Z: III, 9; KSA IV, 234),<sup>21</sup> that his soul sneezes (*Ibid.*), that a tree can act as a seeing witness (Z: III, 11 §1; KSA IV, 236), that his eyes and entrails laugh (Z: IV, 9; KSA IV, 339), that eternity has a fragrance and odor (Z: IV, 19 §6; KSA IV, 400),<sup>22</sup> etc. All of these factors designate that the text operates according to an altogether different epistemological order. Now, let’s briefly consider the possibility of Nietzsche being synaesthetic.

On 10 February 1883, Nietzsche makes an intriguing allusion to having experiential knowledge of synaesthesia in a letter to Overbeck. “How can I help having,” Nietzsche states, almost with excitement, “*an extra sense organ* and a new, terrible source of suffering!”<sup>23</sup> This admission corresponds precisely with accounts given by synaesthetes of their experiences, some of which include painful sensations in the fingertips due to certain consonants, of letters being bitter, scalding hot and capable of producing terror, while color hearing can cause fatigue and headaches. These experiences offer insight into what Nietzsche articulates in the passages now under discussion. In another letter, he claims that his words “have *other colors* than the same words from other people” and that with him “there is much *multicolored* foreground.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in the final aphorism of the *Gay Science* he refers to *painting* gloomy question marks while in the final aphorism of *Beyond Good and Evil* he speaks of his *painted* thoughts as being once “so colorful” and “full of thorns and secret spices” that they caused him to sneeze and laugh. When such thoughts are transformed into words, they lose their “fragrance” or sensorial dimension, but, Nietzsche protests, he alone has “colors, many colors perhaps, many motley caresses and fifty yellows and browns and greens and reds” for his wicked thoughts. While these may unquestionably be figurative statements, the parallel with the experience synaesthetes have of words is arresting.

## **Synaesthesia and the *Übermensch***

Through considering the possibility of perceiving the world from three completely different non-human perspectives, we will Nietzsche asserts be led to realize that there is no regularity to nature. What is doubly intriguing about the following passage from

“Truth and Lies” is that a “sight stimulus” is considered capable of producing sound: “If each of us had a different kind of sense perception—if we could only perceive things now as a bird, now as a worm, now as a plant, or if one of us saw a stimulus as red, another as blue, *while a third even heard the same stimulus as a sound*—then no one would speak of such a regularity of nature, rather, nature would be grasped only as a creation which is subjective in the highest degree” (*TL* §1, emphasis added; *KSA* I, 885). Most crucial here is that, in opposition to normative perception, synaesthesia reveals the radical instability of the world, its perpetual and dynamic flux. Thus, synaesthetic perception is the most or more accurate epistemological modality and it is precisely such a modality that is necessary for comprehending a figure as protean as the *Übermensch*.

If she never discusses synaesthesia but tantalizingly circles within its vicinity, Jill Marsden recognizes that the *Übermensch* is to be approached via radically other means. “To develop the conditions for sensing the overhuman,” she believes that “one has to suspend the intellectual values that guide one’s thought and be guided in turn by one’s senses.”<sup>25</sup> With this approach, a new praxis for encountering the *Übermensch* is initiated. Marsden comes the closest to distinguishing what is necessary for this holistic approach to philosophy when she notes that “to be affected by the *Übermenschlich*—to experience it—is not to take up an intellectual position. Somehow,” she surmises, “we are required to develop sensitivity to different cues, to push the exercise of thinking beyond its usual range” (106). However, it is not only that we are to impel thinking into a different range, but it is necessary to cultivate a more dynamic use of our senses, that we think and sense *together*. What must be abandoned she argues is “the assumption that the overhuman is to be approached conceptually” (107). Instead, Marsden suggests, “we might say that the overhuman is to be sensed in Nietzsche’s thinking at the very point where cognition fails” (109). One might conceive this somewhat differently though—the *Übermensch* is to be sensed not where cognition fails completely, but where it *acquiesces* to the body, where a new harmonic constellation of the senses and reason is developed. And when illustrating in *Ecce Homo* how *Zarathustra*, his *felt* text, is to be received, Nietzsche stresses that the book is constituted of alpine air and that its halcyon tone must be heard aright if we are not to be unjust to “the meaning of its wisdom.” To exercise this justice is an equally if not predominantly sensorial task. Following this counsel, Nietzsche quotes a profoundly suggestive passage from his magnum opus that offers further illumination into Zarathustra’s teaching. It also directs us towards explicitly *how* it is to be embodied or incorporated: Zarathustra compares his teachings to good, sweet figs that are so ripe they are about to burst and invites us to “drink their juice and their sweet flesh!” Once again, we are given a sensory oriented task, this time a gustatory or digestive one, and this must be thought beyond the realm of mere metaphor, for it is precisely here that Nietzsche evokes his most honored and ancient synaesthetic forbear, Empedocles.

In his *Poem*, Empedocles offers similar counsel to his disciples when commanding them to press his words down underneath their dense-packed diaphragms and to let them grow. As to Zarathustra, words to Empedocles are food, or seeds, and in order to cultivate such nutrients his disciples have to *breathe* them in and “bury them deep inside [their] own entrails like seeds,”<sup>26</sup> not just comprehend them rationally. “Perceive,” Empedocles instructs, “just as the pledges from our Muse command after

splitting what I am saying in your entrails.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche uses the exact same agricultural metaphors as Empedocles but, oddly, Lampert does not make this observation, nor have any other commentators. Aside from referring to Zarathustra as a sower who casts forth his seed (Z: II, 1; KSA IV, 105), he instructs humanity that it must plant the seed of its highest hope in order to give birth to a dancing star (Z: P §5; KSA IV, 19). He also believes that truths are engendered from seeds (Z: III, 13 §7; KSA IV, 251) and that “a genuine son and consummate heir” will grow from the seed of the superior humans (Z: IV, 11; KSA IV, 351). Like Empedocles, Zarathustra discusses the necessity of *chewing on words* and of *grinding and crushing them* until they *flow like milk into his soul* (Z: IV, 7; KSA IV, 327). This art of rumination, of chewing thoughts like cud is exactly akin to Empedocles’ instruction to his disciples to force his teachings deep inside themselves like seeds, to split them, to give birth to them in their entrails. Beyond thinking alone, there is a *bodily process* that must occur in order to truly fathom these teachings or activate them. “Thinking” though is not just a rational process, or, in contradistinction to Descartes, it is not one that can easily be differentiated from the body. “The skin,” as Deane Juhan asserts, “is no more separated from the brain than the surface of a lake is separate from its depths [ . . . ] The brain is a single functional unit, from cortex to fingertips to toes. To touch the surface is to stir the depths.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, our entrails, which Nietzsche believes is the strongest part of us, like other parts of our bodies, may very well be involved in the process of “thinking” just as are our senses, whose functions are not limited to the external organs that characterize them.

## Conclusion

If Zarathustra’s voice is “thunder enough that even graves will learn to listen!” and, more pertinent, it is “a healing potion even for those born blind” (Z: III, 13 §1, 188; KSA IV, 270-271), something distinctive is operating in the text that demands careful consideration. To construe such rhetoric derogatorily as simple hyperbole, as does Gooding-Williams for instance, is to be insensate to the philosophical task Nietzsche struggles to achieve. Alerting the reader to the “synaesthetic epistemology” and new mode of *sensus communis* that he advances, as opposed to stating it, Nietzsche *attunes* us to what is quite clearly an instrumental aspect of his philosophy, seducing us to *sense* it. As vigilant readers, we must not neglect these signals—the synaesthetic dimensions of his texts are far from strictly metaphoric. Nietzsche explicitly avows in the *Nachlaß* that “our eyes hear much more keenly than our ears” (KSA X, 103). Since he limits “truth” to what is humanly thinkable, visible, and sensible, in projecting before humanity its former holistic totality he calls us to animate a modality we are capable of animating. If as many neuroscientists assert synaesthesia can be developed, Nietzsche presents humanity with a spectacular challenge that demands consideration.<sup>29</sup> When he asks repeatedly whether or not he has been “understood,” we might wonder if one of the main reasons why we have failed to “understand” him is because we have not approached him synaesthetically. He does state that “the more abstract the truth which one wishes to teach, the more one must first entice the *senses*” (BGE §128; KSA X, 193). At very least, Zarathustra’s teaching clearly seems to demand this, which Marsden also recognizes, and if “understanding” also requires “understanding”

another's blood as Zarathustra asserts, the task of perception that is set for us is clearly a body oriented one.<sup>30</sup> In placing man "back among the animals" (AC §14; KSA VI, 180), Nietzsche restores the nervous system and the senses to the body for thinking itself is *bodily*, but in tearing ourselves to pieces, in reducing ourselves to nothing but "earmen and eyemen" we reduce ourselves to the emaciated stalks Zarathustra castigates, inverse cripples incapable of activating our synaesthetic capacity and *uniting* reason and the senses, which would create the most powerful if not truthful epistemological mode.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The two basic perspectives regarding the senses: a) there are five senses that function independently; and b) there is *one* sense organ with five *suborgans*. See Heinz Werner, "Unity of the Senses," in Sybil S. Barten and Margery B. Franklin, eds., *Developmental Processes: Heinz Werner's Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 153-167.

<sup>2</sup> If Nietzsche's view of Parmenides is a distortion, which some scholars would argue, thinkers such as Empiricus had the same view, which is to say, this is how he was interpreted by a large number of thinkers: "Parmenides rejected opinionative reason [. . .] and assumed as criterion the cognitive—that is, the inerrant—reason, as he gave up belief in the senses." See *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians*, tr. Robert G. Bury, Vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 57, or S.E., *Adversus Mathematicus* §I, 111.

<sup>3</sup> It is instructive to recall that not only did Nietzsche "write" while on vigorous walks, later transcribing into notebooks what he thought during those peripatetic moments, he also often recited his aphorisms aloud to amanuenses. Thus, reading and writing for him always had an auditory dimension. In this regard, see *BGE* §§ 246, 247; *KSA* V, 190-191.

<sup>4</sup> For another passage on the coarsening or obstruction of the senses, see "On Truth and Lying" §1; *KSA* I, 876.

<sup>5</sup> See William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802)," in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 599.

<sup>6</sup> The German for brain-ventricles is *Hirnkammern*, a neologism Nietzsche created specifically to convey the idea of a brain possessing chambers as if it were also a heart.

<sup>7</sup> For the evolution of the ear, see *Daybreak* §250; *KSA* III, 205.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> On the "godlike feeling" Nietzsche calls true humaneness, see *GS* §337; *KSA* III, 564. This extraordinary and profound aphorism advances a conception of compassion that far supersedes the Christian notion of pity. What could be more thoughtful and sublimely magnanimous than the "godlike feeling" Nietzsche calls humaneness?

<sup>10</sup> For a contemporary example, the Turkish painter Esref Armagan, who was born blind, asserts that he can see with his fingers. "No one," he joyfully affirms, "can call me blind. I can see more with my fingers than sighted people can see with their eyes." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QUOy83po60>.

<sup>11</sup> For similar warnings, but from a poetic context, see "Au Lecteur" in Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), and the first canto in Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869).

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 300.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," in *The Nietzsche Reader*, eds. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Duncan Large (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 115; *KSA* I, 877.

<sup>14</sup> Hofmannsthal may have Empedocles' notion in mind, too, or Nietzsche's, when he has Chandos state in his letter to Lord Bacon that "we could enter into a new, momentous relationship with all of existence if we began to think with our hearts." See "A Letter," in Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2005), 125.

<sup>15</sup> See *BGE* §14 (*KSA* V, 28) for a similar passage on the senses and the difference between the strength of the senses of those in Plato's time, or just of Plato himself, versus the degree of strength of the senses of those in Nietzsche's day and age, if not surely our own.

<sup>16</sup> Greta Berman. "Synesthesia and the Arts," *Leonardo*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1999): 15.

<sup>17</sup> Cretien van Campen, *The Hidden Sense: Synesthesia in Art and Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 100.

<sup>18</sup> See *BGE* §14 (*KSA* V, 28) for another passage on exercising mastery of the senses. Also, for Kant, sense perception is passive whereas for Nietzsche, or in synaesthetic perception, it certainly is not.

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<sup>19</sup> Think here of Nietzsche's statement that "truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force [ . . .]" (TL §1).

<sup>20</sup> During that synaesthetic episode, Zarathustra learns from Life of the will to power; with that specific knowledge, he will "go on to solve the riddle" of the *hearts* of his disciples.

<sup>21</sup> In HH: II, Nietzsche speaks of words having odors: "Every word has its odor: there exists a harmony and disharmony of odors thus of words" (WS §119; KSA II, 604).

<sup>22</sup> Zarathustra is also referred to as a roaring stream (II, 1; KSA IV, 106) and as a forest and a night of dark trees (II, 10; KSA IV, 139). Also, earlier in the book his "I" teaches him the new pride of carrying an *earthen* head that creates a sense for the earth (I, 3; KSA IV, 37).

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, ed. and tr. Christopher Middleton (New York: Hackett Publishing, 1996), 206. Emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> Venice, 20 May 1885; KSB III, 3.53, letter # 602. For a passage on how human endeavors have color see HH §150; KSA II, 143, and for one on how significance has an odor: HH §217; KSA II, 177.

<sup>25</sup> Jill Marsden. "Sensing the Overhuman," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 30 (2005): 114.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Kingsley, *Reality* (California: Golden Sufi Center, 2003), 523.

<sup>27</sup> Kingsley 2003, 551. For a different translation of the same passage see Inwood 203 (fr. 3/4).

<sup>28</sup> Deane Juhan, *Job's Body: A Handbook for Bodywork* (New York: Station Hill Press, 2003), 43.

<sup>29</sup> According to neuroscientific research, all infants experience different modes of synaesthesia in the first several months of their lives. Thus, the condition is considered to be "normal" and a stage of sensory development.

<sup>30</sup> This is not to suggest that one cannot grasp Nietzsche's ideas unless one is synaesthetic, for one clearly can, but if the transfiguration of the human that Nietzsche seeks to instigate is to occur, it seems necessary to approach his *felt* texts in a more holistic manner, that is, synaesthetically.