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WHAT WERE THE NEW ROLES OF COLOUR IN POST-CONCEPTUAL ART?

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“I declare that this dissertation has not already been accepted in substance, or in part, for any degree and is not currently submitted in candidature for any degree. I further affirm that the substance of this work is entirely the result of my own independent research, except where otherwise stated.”

My dissertation did not need ethical approval.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'eviebanks', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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## Abstract

This essay will look at how colour's role has changed and adapted throughout the history of art, drawing comparisons and bringing the various arguments back to a direct comparison with post-Conceptualist roles of colour. It will take into consideration the role of colour as secondary to form, bringing David Batchelor's concept of *Chromophobia* (2000) into discussion as a specific study of the refinement of colour to form, as a traditional role of colour in art. It will also consider elements that had an influence in changing perceptions of colour and its abilities within art. The role of colour as a form of self-expression, as experience and as optical illusion will be discussed, through reference to the experiments of Josef Albers in the *Interaction of Colors* (2013) and through analysis of a number of post-Conceptualist artists. This essay will chronologically document how opinions towards colour have shifted throughout art history, to come to a conclusion that considers the paradoxical nature of colour, and the importance of our approach to colour in understanding our phenomenological and visual position in the world.

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## Introduction

Colour is a complex phenomenon that can be used as a powerful and emotive tool, and has no one definable function within art. Scholars have yet to comprehend the range of ways that artists use colour. From refinement within form; to colour as a material of self-expression demonstrated in the practice of Henri Matisse; to relation to colour psychology in the manipulation of colour interaction to create optical effects through retinal fatigue. Due to an interest in colour and the exploration of theory within my artistic practice, I was led to understand colour further as this complex phenomenon, on which there is large scope for artistic exploration. Thus my focal point became post-Conceptualist uses of colour, as I believe them to be the most applicable to contemporary art. Throughout this paper the focal aim lies in the exploration of various colour roles, specifically of roles within post-Conceptualism. Discussed within Josef Albers' *Interaction of Colours* (2013), terminology for the colour spectrum is inadequate: 'Though there are innumerable colours – shades and tones – in daily vocabulary, there are only about 30 colour names.' (Albers 2013, p.5). There appears to be a fundamental mismatch between colour and language. If basic terminology is lacking at this primary stage then it is reasonable to suggest that more complex concepts within our knowledge of colour and its roles in art become uncertain, making it difficult to place definitive roles upon colour within art.

As colour is such a broad topic this essay will take a focus on post-Conceptualism, attempting to interrogate some of the potential roles of colour by drawing comparisons between previous ideologies and what they sought to achieve, and through analysis of the varying roles of colour within artists' practices. In chapter one a basis in traditional Western art will be established through discussion of David Batchelor's *Chromophobia* (2000) which refers to a fear of corruption in the art image through colour, and thus a relation to its traditional confinement within form. The concept of nomenclature and its limits will be discussed in chapter one and

two, in reference as a causation of this essence of ‘chromophobia’, as well as in Josef Albers’ experiments into the interactions between colours; the term nomenclature thus refers to this mismatch between what we can see and what we can verbalise. Subjects of religion and negative hallucination will be added, in an attempt to understand the reasoning for ‘chromophobia’ and to set a strong point of comparison for later in the essay when I begin to discuss how ideas about colour and its roles have changed. Chapter two will begin a gradual transition into these changing ideas, looking at the experiments of Josef Albers in *Interaction of Colors* (2013) and their importance in the development of our understanding of the interactions between colours and the optical illusions they can evoke. In relation to colour’s role as a material, the elimination of facture will be discussed in chapter two in reference to Henri Matisse’s paper *Cut Outs* (Figs. 3 & 4) and Gerhard Richter’s *Colour Charts* (Fig. 5). Facture referring to visual evidence of the process of making, such as brush marks. A definition of post-Conceptualism will be established through the comparison of Conceptualist ideologies, and references to artists including John Baldessari that helped to support these differences and mark a turning point. When defining post-Conceptualism in chapter two, an ontological position that makes reference to the metaphysical concern of the nature of being is discussed. Through this I attempt to show the relationship between the concepts of Conceptualism and categorisation of colour’s roles within post-Conceptualism. This shift into the post-Conceptual was necessary for colour’s liberation, and by pinpointing ways in which artists such as James Turrell, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Gerhard Richter and Peter Halley have channeled colour into their practices within chapter three, it appears possible to establish some of the potential roles of colour within post-Conceptual art. The relationship between colour and experience will be taken as a specific example of a potential role of colour in post-Conceptual art, as it has applications to both the practice of Turrell and Cruz-Diez, but with different underlying connotations; with Turrell using colour as an overwhelming, disorientating experience as opposed to the self-aware quality of Cruz-Diez’s *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7).

# Chapter One. The Essence of ‘Chromophobia’, Establishing Traditional Roles of Colour

## 1.1 The Secondary Role of Colour

Referring back to Alber’s statement of the inadequacy between colour and language, the asymmetry between what we see and what we can verbalise, combined with the haziness surrounding colour’s categorisation, leads to the phenomenon of ‘chromophobia’, a term coined by David Batchelor. In his analysis of colour Batchelor discusses several key topics associated with colour within art, such as colour being ‘anti-disciplinary’ (Batchelor 2000, p.97). This seems particularly fitting when comparing colour with post-Conceptual art, as its aims are to seek new sources of inspiration and revolutionise formats of creating. Batchelor discusses art criticism and its venture into the analysis of colour as getting caught in a ‘thicket of words’ as to verbalise it would become too ‘laboured’; but most importantly Batchelor discusses the uncertainty of colour’s role, ‘colour speaks silently for itself in art, and that any attempt to speak on its behalf is bound to fail.’ (Batchelor 2000, p.98). Although this statement appears pessimistic, it allows for deeper analysis of colour as of having no one definable function. Batchelor further goes on to say that there is a ‘silence around the very subject of colour in art which itself speaks volumes.’ (Batchelor 2000, p.98) Thus, room is left for a multitude of utilisations of colour within art and is unlikely to become tedious due to these boundless interpretations. This is also a recurring theme throughout Charles Riley’s *Color Codes* (1995) where this profound uneasiness is exactly what drives artists: ‘Precisely because it is a largely unknown force, color remains one of the most vital sources of new styles and ideas,’ Riley (1995, quoted in Mottram 2006, p.405-416). If we were to understand colour fully then there would be no room for development, thus an incomprehension is exactly what pushes radical and post-Conceptual art practice forward, making way for new developments through the corruption of previous ideologies.

Chromophobia is important to address when discussing colour within art as a consequence for how its role has changed. Due to the complex and uncertain nature of colour, the only way to understand its developments appears to be through drawing comparisons. Chromophobia, and the rejection and prejudice against colour stems from its unknowing nature, as identified by Batchelor, 'a fear of contamination and corruption by something that is unknown or appears unknowable.' (Batchelor 2000, p.22). As it is largely unknowable it becomes easy to marginalize and deny significance and complexity within art. Batchelor goes on to discuss the reasoning for the devaluation in colour's traditional role within Western art, narrowing it down to two reasons. Firstly, colour is made to be part of the unfamiliar body, usually that of the 'feminine', 'primitive' or 'infantile'. In the second 'colour is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or cosmetic.' (Batchelor 2000, p.23) It is within this second deduction that this sense of chromophobia is highlighted so clearly. Taken from Aristotelian theory 'a random distribution of the most attractive colours would never yield as much pleasure as a definite image without colour.' Aristotle (quoted in Lichtenstein 1993, p.59), suggests that no matter how colour is utilised, from a traditional viewpoint its role will never be considered of an equal comparative to line.

To further understand the support behind the rejection of colour and its secondary role to line Batchelor discusses the ideals of Charles Blanc, an appropriately named assailant of colour; in his belief that only inorganic nature has the language of colour to describe it, for instance how only colour can tell us if a stone is a sapphire or a ruby. Accordingly, colour is only a 'peculiar characteristic' of the lower forms found within nature. Although Blanc attempts to demonstrate colour's secondary status through its attachment to the 'lower forms' of the natural world, as a 'supplementary' to line (Batchelor 2000, p.25) it seems plausible to argue that this is exactly why colour's role in art is, and should be considered significant. Colour holds the power to distinguish and differentiate features when drawing cannot. Thereupon, it can be argued that



its powers of differentiation are supportive to the value of colour's role within art, as opposed to one of its diminishing features; moving it from secondary status into one of the fundamental elements of an art image.

The secondary role of colour is apparent in the majority of traditional Western art, including the practice of Francis Towne whose watercolour's highlight traditions for colour to fill out form. Predominant within many of Towne's 'paintings' is the viewer's ability to be able to distinguish between the line and colour, with line taking visual precedence as the focal point of the image. This resonates with traditional landscape painting which often favoured flat colours, which act to highlight how artists chose to limit the capabilities of paint. It is easy to see how colour is implemented to fill in blank space between lines, especially within a lot of the earlier works of Towne, as choice in palette consists of subdued tones as not to avert the eyes away from the image as a whole. Demonstrated within *In St John's in the Vale* (Fig. 1) 1786, line becomes the main focus of the image. If it were to be removed, then the resulting image would be a collection of undistinguishable hues, which is most identifiable within the mountain area to the left hand-side of the watercolour. Within the painting Towne has an ascetic use of colour, using monochrome washes in large areas. Returning to Batchelor's concept of colour being 'anti-disciplinary' (Batchelor 2000, p.97), Towne's ascetic application was important so as not to avert the eyes from the drawing with the meaningless distraction of bright colour; colour thus must be controlled to avoid destruction of the image. No detail in colour is pursued in *In St John's in the Vale* (Fig.1), this is instead the function of the line. Curator, Dr Richard Stephens makes light of this ideology within online article '*Why Francis Towne is having a moment*' written in collaboration with the exhibition *Light, time, legacy: Francis Towne's watercolours of Rome* (2016). Stephens makes reference to Towne's training as a coach painter, that he 'learned to play with the pen, to create flat patterns and colours that don't have any great meaning' (Christies, 2016). It is through this mention of the lack of

meaning that the concept of colour's secondary role is particularly supported. This statement shows great relation to *In St John's in the Vale* (Fig. 1) through Towne's ascetic application, as colour is merely ornamental. Stephens makes reference throughout the article to Towne's landscapes' reality lying in very beautiful drawings, and it is noticeable in many sources that despite colour exceeding areas in comparison to line, the images are still referenced as drawings.



Figure 1. Francis Towne, *In St John's in the Vale*, 1786, 15.6 x 23.5 cm, pencil, pen and grey and brown inks, and watercolour.

### 1.2 The Effect of Negative Hallucination

The presence of chromophobia is reiterated through the concept of negative hallucination; a term which describes not perceiving what is visibly there. This appears fitting in the discussion of colour's traditional role with art, as well as its utilisation within Conceptual art, who retracted to a limited palette of black and white, colours in some sense not always considered to be colours. Suggesting that the Conceptualist fetish of black and white could be their attempt

at using the least coloured colours possible so as not to detract from concept. Applying negative hallucination across to the traditional role of colour within art, it is apparent in mimetic translation in which colours are copied across from life to canvas, with no attention paid to the importance of colour alone, instead only considered secondary to line. Art criticism in the period of the reign of traditional art reinforced this concept of negative hallucination, through their unbroken vow on the silence of colour ‘even when it is right literally staring them in the face.’ (Batchelor 2000, p.31).

As chromophobia’s other defining feature is its attempt to purge and devalue colour, it is so feared as colour cannot be given a stable meaning or function. This seems fitting when looking at tradition, as colour is restricted to the margins of aesthetics and follows the strict laws of mimetic translation, evidenced when looking back at Towne’s *In St John’s in the Vale* (Fig. 1); with Western critical writing of art at the time, outwardly projecting comparable views. The ideas of Aristotle are supportive of this claim in the dismissal of colour’s importance, insisting that art was consumed by ‘line and that all the rest, including colour, was merely ornamental’ (Bleicher 2005, p.20). The dismissal of colour as ‘ornamental’ highlights the hierarchical ordering within traditions of painting, with the role of colour sitting towards the end of the spectrum of priority. Batchelor also references Aristotle’s views from his *Poetics*, further exemplifying this statement, ‘a random distribution of the most attractive colours would never yield as much pleasure as a definite image without colour.’, Aristotle, Lichtenstein (1993, quoted in Batchelor 2000, p.29). Within *Chromophobia* (2000), Batchelor identifies the root within all prejudices being the mask for a fear, in this case the ‘corruption’ through something that we may never fully understand. ‘As with all prejudices, its manifest form, its loathing, masks a fear: a fear of contamination and corruption by something that is unknown or appears unknowable.’ (Batchelor 2000, p.22). Due to its unknowingness, the only way thus to avoid a fall through colour was to abandon or control it, demonstrated in traditional painting such as

*In St John's in the Vale* (Fig.1) through colour's relegation to filling out form. Colour is such a complex phenomenon that it is understandable that a fear accompanies it; where we may have a complete understanding of line and form, colour is still clouded in mystery. This mystery most likely manifests from the inadequacy in nomenclature, previously discussed in Albers' *Interaction of Colors* (2013) in which we only have around thirty names to describe an incomprehensible number of colours (Albers year, p.3). This is vital when considering a chromophobic standpoint; if there are no linguistic means of categorisation for colour in order to describe it, then it begs the question of how we can ever be certain of a full comprehension. There is a fundamental mismatch in what we can see and what we can verbalise, 'Color refuses to conform to schematic and verbal systems. It often will not even conform to itself physically.' (Riley 1995, p.12). If we are unable to verbalise colour at its very initial stage, then a deep comprehension and the ability to articulate this understanding seems almost impossible. Thus, it seems only reasonable to either embrace the unknowing quality of colour, or to demonstrate an understanding of its functions through application and experiments into colour interactions.

### 1.3 The Role of Religion

Important to consider when discussing Batchelor's concept of 'chromophobia' within relation to the traditional role of colour in art, is chromophobia as a consequence of religion's influence on society at the time. Religion is a key component of the celebration of mimesis within traditional Western painting, due to the idea that everything 'God' creates is a gift in which there is no improvement upon perfection. There is an undeniable link between the colour theory of Aristotle and religion. Discussed in Stephen Bleicher's *Contemporary Colour Theory and Use* (2005), the close relation between colour hue and the natural world demonstrates the 'spiritual manifestation in paint' of the 'devout convictions' to visual truth, which posits the religious connotations set within traditional painting (Bleicher 2005, p.20). In allegiance with these Aristotelian views were that of art critic Charles Blanc, who believed that when colour

was used predominantly, it held the power to change the sentiment of an artwork and alter and manipulate its original course: ‘And where does that leave us? Fallen. From a lofty place tantalizingly close to God ... and ended up face down among the lower forms of nature.’ (Batchelor 2000, p.27). The concept of a fall from God links back to the idea of colour being relegated to the lower forms found within nature, in a meditated attempt to diminish the significance of colour’s role within art. The alliance with mimesis may derive from the religious alliance to light. Within Christianity, light holds a substantial amount of meaning as without light we cannot know; it is the principle of manifestation acting as a metaphor of truth and knowledge. When later comparing Turrell’s use of light to exhibit unmodulated colour to this traditional religious manifestation in which mimesis is encouraged, it becomes clear how colour’s role has developed within art practice. Understanding and identification of the post-Conceptual uses of colour seems only possible through discussion with traditional roles of colour, in which comparison can be drawn.

#### 1.4 Chromophilia

The more colour is discussed, the more apparent it becomes that there are several forms of chromophobia. Traditional, conceptual, but also a more contemporary fear in the attempt to preserve the purity of colour; the idea of trying to keep the paint and more specifically its colour as pure as it is in the can. It seems natural and understandable for an artist to hold at least minute chromophobic values, as colour is an endlessly complex subject in which a level of uncertainty will always prevail. But it is through this uncertainty and unknowable quality of colour that art, both post-Conceptual and moving forward into the contemporary, are able to develop. A more contemporaneous development of chromophobia is the concept of ‘chromophilia’, later discussed by Batchelor in *Chromophobia* (2000). Chromophilia refers to the idea of colour as a material, one possible function of colour within post-Conceptual art to be later considered. This was a new category within chromophobia which came about in the 1960’s; now rather

than dismissing the significance of colour, the issue became about trying to preserve its purity in the translation from can to canvas. Reference to the can is that of a move away from traditional painting materials such as oils, and into 'readymade' industrial paint. Artists abandoned the entire tradition of easel painting and thus the traditional sense of chromophobia that accompanied it. However, a new anxiety developed in alignment with chromophobia, reiterating the previous point that due to the unknowing nature of colour, it is reasonable to suggest that some essence of chromophobia or at the very least worried thought, will always accompany painting through colour application or lack of.

## Chapter Two. Understanding Post-Conceptualism.

### 2.1 Discussing the Interactions Between Colours

The presence of Batchelor's concept of 'chromophobia' within much of traditional painting, and the refinement of colour's role as secondary to form, stems from the unknowable quality of colour. Explained in the first chapter, this unknowability is due to the constant state of flux colour is in, in which it continuously deceives. Josef Albers' studies into the *Interactions of Color* (2013) help us to further understand its barriers and limited nomenclature, referencing the innumerable colours we can see in comparison to the basic language we have to describe them. Encouraging a physical exploration of colour as opposed to theoretical, the experiments Albers conducted explored this state of constant flux, focusing on the deceptive qualities of colour and optical illusions they can create, through use of colour as material. Albers was able to manipulate the perception of one colour through its interaction with varying colour grounds, linking back to this idea that 'Color deceives continuously.' (Riley 1996, p.6), and the uncertainty of its true state without the influence of extraneous variables. Albers highlights within his experiments that colours are constantly dictated by other conditions, which include the light they are seen in and how each eye perceives colour differently. However in his experiments, Albers manipulates colour perception to be dictated by other colours you see, how one colour's quality can change when seen on different colour backgrounds. Returning to the idea of colour in constant flux, Umberto Eco's *How Culture Conditions the Colours We See* (1985) clarifies these conditions, supporting Albers' findings. Eco identifies the various factors affecting colour, including that of 'natural surfaces, light' and 'contrast between objects' (Eco 1985, p.157), informing us to how our perception of colour is continuously influenced by surrounding extraneous variables. Although these factors will have had influence on the painting experiments of Albers, his use of colour ground in both his experiments and

practice manipulates colour in a way that it becomes the main contributor in optical deception, thus becoming both subject matter and the extraneous variable.

A chromatic effect of deception can be identified in *Study for Homage to the Square: Beaming* 1963 (Fig.2), part of a series of artworks that accompanied Albers' experiments with the *Interactions of Color* (2013). Three main hues can be identified within the painting, all of which differ from within the colour blue. The first hue is a bright blue that is applied around the outer edges of fibreboard, and within this expanse of brightness sits a muted, darker blue. Finally embedded within this muted tone is a green-blue. Our perception of each colour is completely different when all three are placed together than if each hue was separated. The smallest square of blue, appears closer to green when compared to the other two hues, just as the darker blue is duller in combination with the other two colours than if looked at alone. The three colours also work together to bring a sense of interactivity and depth within the painting. Unlike in traditional painting in which sense of depth is created through the addition of shadows against objects, Albers is able to achieve the same through optical illusion, in which our eyes find that the muted blue recedes into the image in a way that pushes the greenish-blue to float on the surface of the painting. Colour is refined to simple geometric form, residing in the use of squares in all of the paintings in the *Homage to the Square* series. It could be suggested that geometric forms are used to cause as little distraction as possible from the role of colour; however as will be discussed later, both Albers and many pre-Conceptual artists believed that the best way to achieve this was in the utilisation of stripes. Thus, it appears Albers' paintings weren't an attempt at a complete escape from form, but instead aimed to create clear perceivable boundaries between colours, in which they could interact to create optical illusions.



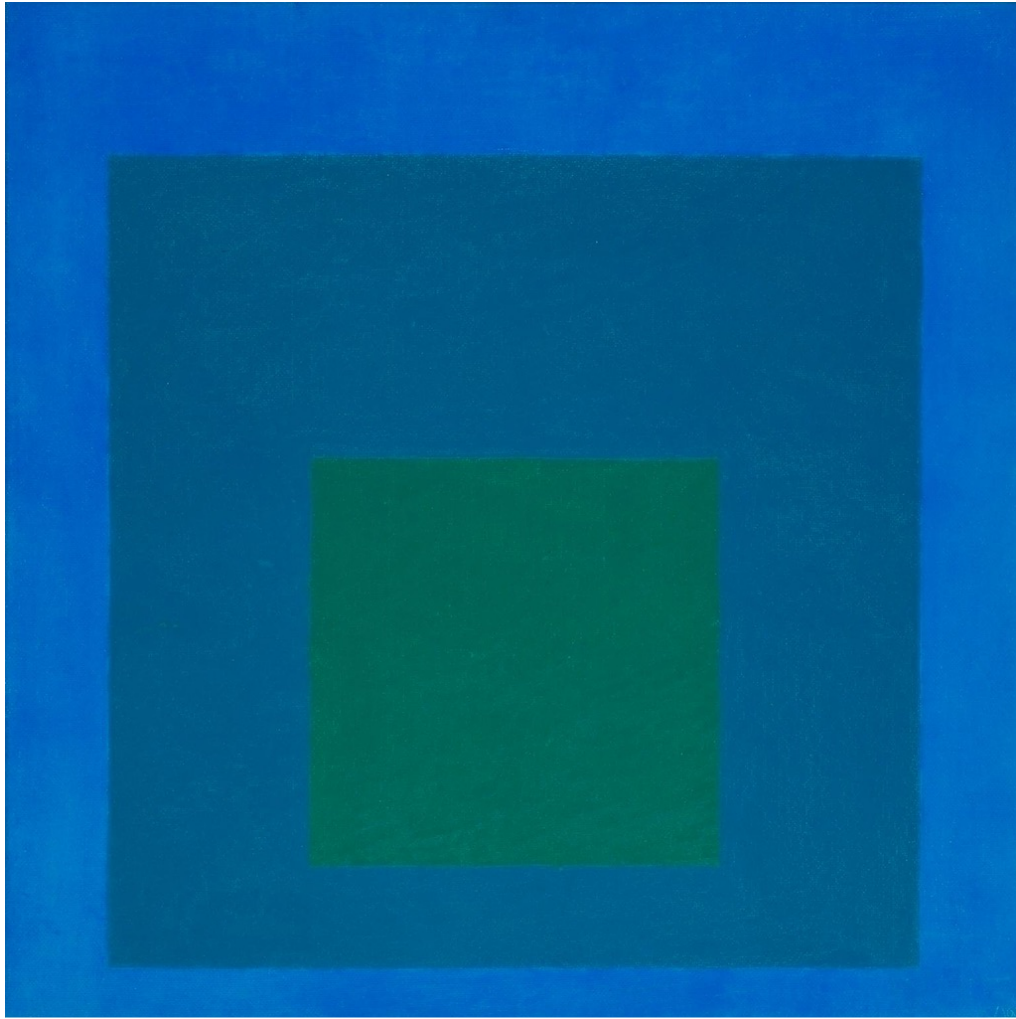


Figure 2. Josef Albers, *Study for Homage to the Square: Beaming*, 1963, 76.2 x.76.2 cm, oil paint of fibreboard

## 2.2 The Perceptual Object

As both post-Conceptualism and colour are little talked about subjects in detail, it becomes paramount to discuss both the ideologies of different artists' uses of colour, and the role of colour in various artistic movements. Albers makes reference to the importance of comparison in *Interactions of Color* (2013), 'we submit to formulations of the past in order to provoke further comparisons of different attitudes... all for the sake of continued self-criticism and self-evaluation.' (Albers 2013, p.49), identifying the importance particularly to that of the past, in order to draw out and identify what has changed. This is pivotal for post-Conceptualism due to the little writing of its beliefs; a lot is left for subjective interpretation. On the note of the

importance of comparison, post-Conceptualism acknowledges and develops from the core beliefs of the Conceptualists. The issue for the Conceptualists was to question art as a perceptual object in order to pursue the prevention of art as something heavily based in aesthetic. Conceptual Art took a myriad of forms but its ideals concentrated on concept taking precedence over visual aesthetic, redefining what it meant for something to be considered art. Art became about the everyday, even more so with the introduction of the Duchampian idea of the 'readymade' most identifiable in Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917, replicated in 1964), which attempted to bypass the commerciality within the art world through a shift of dominance into concept over aesthetic. Despite this forefront and leap in development, a sense of chromophobia was still rooted within Conceptualism; an explanation into their chromophobic nature developing from their core beliefs. Although historical art was chromophobic in the sense of colour's role being secondary to line used visually to fill out form, Conceptual art may have been chromophobic by having opposite beliefs. The finished artwork was no longer as important as the concept behind it, thus colour could be considered to hinder conceptual basis, acting as a distraction to what was of true importance. Whereas traditional Western art saw colour's role as secondary confined to that of the 'ornamental', Conceptualism's neutralisation of anything 'aesthetic', which would include that to be considered 'ornamental' would also therefore be dismissive of colour (Bleicher 2005, p.20). Choice in palette discussed in chapter one thus fitted accordingly, limited mainly to black and white, colours often disregarded and not always considered colours. Despite post-Conceptualism's acknowledgement of the significance of concept that was implemented within Conceptualism, colour was also reintroduced demonstrated in the work of artists including, Gerhard Richter, James Turrell, Carlos Cruz-Diez and Peter Halley, to be later discussed.

### 2.3 The Relationship of Colour and Form

The significance of the role of colour in art is constantly redefined when considering the rejection of colour in Conceptualism, leading to a reintroduction and appreciation within post-Conceptualism. Reflecting upon the pre-Conceptual artwork of Henri Matisse, it becomes clearer of the uncertainty of colour role within ever-changing art opinions; with Matisse as an example of a pioneer of colour rebellion in the pre-Conceptual art movement of Fauvism. Through particular focus upon the paper 'Cut-Outs' of Matisse, an interest in colour is re-established. Colour choice took a basis in observation with a role to 'serve expression as well as possible' (Riley 1996, p.73), thus relating sensitivity in felt experiences in which colour could render his sensations. Above all else colour became a means of liberation. The use of paper as opposed to paint permitted the *Cut-Outs* (Figs.3& 4) to make repeated use of consistent and unmodulated colour, extending to successful repetition through the elimination of a change in application of paint, and of surface texture disturbance typically associated with brush marks. By erasing any sense of facture, focus on the physical qualities of colour was ensured with Matisse understanding it as 'a completely relative phenomenon', with colour's relationship to painting becoming 'more important than the ties between the work and the subject depicted.' (Riley 1996, p.73). When comparing back to traditional Western confinement of colour's role as secondary to form, a switch appears to occur within Matisse's practice between 'subject depicted' and colour (Riley 1996, p.73). With a preference of paper over paint, colours reach 'precisely from edge to edge.' and through such, colour reverts to 'again advocate shape first' (Albers 2013, p.45). Matisse inadvertently highlights the seemingly unescapable relationship between colour and form once again within art.

The apparent inescapable relationship seems to be of constant struggle in relation to colour, with many artists searching for a neutral form 'which would allow their colour free reign' (Gage 1999, p.256). In relation to the previous discussion of Josef Albers' search for the neutral

form, Gene Davis and Kenneth Noland are comparable artists who sought to achieve ‘free reign’ (Gage 1999, p.256) through the repetition of form, specifically through the use of stripe paintings; with a belief in stripes that their form would not detract from the focus on colour due to their ‘simple matrix’, in which the eye is not distracted with ‘formal adventures’ (Gage 1999, p.266). An Albers’ theory lies in the exclusiveness of stripes and how the viewer is led to ‘overlook their rather equal shapes and to consider them almost shapeless.’ (Albers 1970, p.46), however this ideology of stripes can only be granted within a limit. Truth may lie in stripes being the closest move away from this relationship with form that physical colour can achieve, but the distinct edges of different colours will inevitably return the eye to this relationship. The idea of a shapelessness within stripes is a naive conception, narrowly avoided by Albers; as colours will always neighbour one another, physical boundaries in both paint and paper can be distinguished. Identified by John Gage in *Colour and Meaning* (2000), the simultaneous contrasts in colour identifiable in the paintings of Albers, Noland and Davis, and the *Cut-Outs* (Figs.3 & 4) of Matisse make notions to the past, with colour and form as ‘inseparable’ (Gage 1999, p.256). To be later discussed, a post-Conceptual resolution to this seemingly inescapable relationship between colour and form is identifiable in the practices of Carlos Cruz-Diez and James Turrell, through the introduction of colour as light. Thus, this inseparable relationship seems only applicable to physical materials including that of paint and paper.



Figure 3. Henri Matisse, *The Snail*, 1953, 286.4 x 287 cm, gouache on paper, cut and pasted on paper mounted on canvas.



Figure 4. Henri Matisse, *Le Lagon*, 1947, 42 x 65.5 cm.

#### 2.4 Defining Post-Conceptualism

Post-Conceptualism is not the name for a particular style of art, rather of an ontological position for the construction of Conceptual and Contemporary art overall. The ontological characteristics being the metaphysical concern with the nature of being. Post-Conceptualism acknowledges the theories and ideals of Conceptualism, where the ideas behind an artwork take some level of precedence over that of traditional aesthetics. Attempting to disparage previous art ideologies, taking inspiration for their practice from an ever-growing amount of resources, post-Conceptualism went on to ‘undermine the validity of formal philosophical aesthetic positions and the criteria that would surround them relating to conventional beauty, truth and religion.’ (Manasseh 2010, p.4). Within Newman’s text *After Conceptual Art: Joe Scanlan’s Nesting Bookcases, Duchamp, Design and the Impossibility of Disappearing* (1999), this extends to the legacy of ‘the alignment of the desire to disappear with the acknowledgement of the impossibility of disappearing’ and accordingly, post-Conceptual art may hold links to a ‘desire to disappear as art object, whether into idea, design or everyday

life' (Newman and Bird 1999, p.206). However post-Conceptualism is not so easily definable or comprehensible just like its counterpart in this thesis, colour. Art progressed from tradition of having a bilateral translation into the prospect of holding multilateral interpretations. Thus, to have some understanding behind the drive of post-Conceptualism, it is paramount to discuss the work of artists associated with its ideals and draw comparisons from previous movement ideologies.

It has been suggested that post-Conceptualism in the initial stages was specifically tied to John Baldessari's *Throwing Four Balls in the Air to Get a Square* from the early 1970's. Taking the best photographs of 36 attempts, 36 attempts relating to the standard number of exposures on a 35mm film; as the name suggests Baldessari presented his closest attempts to aligning all four balls in the air into the shape of a square, celebrating chance as the very subject of his work. Post-Conceptualism moved outside the confines of the gallery, and according to Manasseh 'would altogether define entirely new ways of making and viewing art.' (Manasseh 2010, p.6) This suggestion from Manasseh appears to hold a close relation to Baldessari's ball studies, as they are not only shot outside of the gallery in an abstracted format, but the photography becomes a form of art in itself, 'Through the magic of photography, gravity was defeated, and the balls never had to come down.' (Kelsey, 2015). The use of photography as such demonstrates how at the end of the 20th century many artists felt that painting had grown old, with Jason Gaiger stating within *Post-Conceptual Meaning: Gerard Richter's Extended Leave-Taking* (2004), that painting had become 'condemned to an increasingly conservative rehearsal of strategies and gestures that had lost their original significance.' (Gaiger 2004, p.89). The use of photography brought about a fresh perspective where time has no hold on objects, creating a new metaphysical realm.

## 2.5 The Influence of Photography

The development in colour's role could be considered consequence to the growth of photography. There appears to be a direct correlation between the growth in photography and the decline in mimesis in art. The writing of Jason Gaiger within *Post-conceptual painting: Gerhard Richter's extended leave-taking* (2004) further supports this development of the role of colour through photography, stating that:

It seems plausible that the reproductive possibilities afforded by photography encouraged artists to break with a conception of painting that was still primarily based on imitation, allowing the work of art to be grasped as an independent entity that contains its own productive possibilities. (Gaiger 2004, p.90)

It could then be suggested that photography offered an excuse to move away from traditional convention, highlighting its part in the liberation of the pre-conceived notion of the painting and as of such, the role of colour within art. As the new, easier and quicker form of mimetic representation, photography left room for both art and colour to reinvent itself and its roles. An interesting concept to consider in the move away from photo-accuracy within art, using the photograph as an alternative, is the now-credibility of the painting, 'The painted picture was no longer credible; its representation froze into immobility, because it was not authentic but invented.' Richter (1964-5, quoted in Gaiger 2004, p.108). Gaiger also goes on to reference the paintings of Gerhard Richter for comparison with the traditional role, in which Richter attempted to overcome the 'invented' nature of the painting by conducting a painting of a photograph as opposed to inventing the subject matter, inviting us to reflect upon, 'the adequacy of both forms of representation in relation to the experience that they seek to capture' (Gaiger 2004, p.115). Richter's photo-paintings aid in the recognition of the capacity of both photography and painting in capturing experience. Gaiger discusses Richter's insistence of the dominance of the photograph for mimetically capturing an image, and through doing such has left an area for art and more specifically colour, to adapt its role demonstrated per se in

Richter's *Colour Charts* (Fig. 5), in which colour is no longer confined to filling out form as a consequence of chromophobic values.

## 2.6 Richter's Color Charts

Establishing the ideologies of post-Conceptual art, it is relevant to consider some of the developed functions of colour for post-Conceptual artists. Referenced above, Gerhard Richter is an artist who constantly played with the different ways to approach painting, pushing the boundaries of what can be considered a painting or in more general terms, art. This has direct associations to the conceptual, Duchampian idea of the 'readymade' which shows particular ties to Richter's *Colour Charts* (Fig. 5) series. It is within the *Colour Charts* (Fig. 5) that the role of colour within post-Conceptual art is questioned most and has the greatest significance to this thesis, moving away from the Duchampian preconceived idea of art.



Figure 5. Gerhard Richter, *180 Colours*, 1971, 200 x 200 cm, lacquer on canvas



Richter's *Colour Charts* (Fig.5) came about in the 1970's with the concept for such deriving from a visit to a hardware store and seeing paint sample charts. The systematical paintings attempted to replicate commercial paint card samples. The *Colour Charts* (Fig.5) were a breakthrough, progressing figuration within art into a rigorous and meticulous, conceptual approach with reference to outside the world of the everyday. The first of Richter's series were completed using oil paint, a traditional material in the history of art. Within these initial paintings lay an element of the handmade, with brush marks leaving a trace of the process of making. Richter however transitioned across to enamel and lacquer for the rest of the series. Making this transition meant that trace of production was eliminated, moving away from the handmade and into an industrial aesthetic in which there were fewer personal connotations tied to the paintings. Looking back to Conceptualism, this shows ties to Duchampian ideologies of the 'readymade' in which artwork held an industrial aesthetic. This creates the impression of the role of colour as material, in which it becomes its own entity. The *Colour Charts* (Fig.5) thus became a way to employ colour without its former associations within the art world, creating the idea of a post-Conceptual role. This shows links to Conceptualism through colour aiding in the creation of something not traditionally considered as being art or an art object. Human design plays no role within the *Colour Charts* (Fig. 5) in as much as the paintings could have been completed by machines due to the lack of human trace, linking back to readymade ideologies. Although there are strong links identified with Duchamp's concept of the readymade, the post-Conceptual standpoint lies within Richter's application of colour. As previously discussed, a sense of 'chromophobia' re-emerges within Conceptualism but Richter's embrace of colour and its qualities as material alone, relinquish any emotional connection thus highlighting its progression and classification within post-Conceptualism.

The idea of colour's role as material plays heavily into consideration. Richter eliminates the role of colour as the driving force for emotion and passion, into a place where it becomes a

neutral element. Despite colour being predominant in the paintings as the foremost subject matter, Richter manages to use large concentrations of unmodulated hue without evoking any particular emotion, marking a turning point for colour's role within art. Use of colour without any trace of facture allows you to recognise colour as a whole; no variation in hue spurs colour to function by itself, removed from any physical material including the medium it is made from. The loss of expressive and symbolic function plays into this idea of colour as material, which may have been aided in the rigorous endeavour of the grid format with the canvases resembling 'nothing so much as manufacturer's catalogues for industrially produced paint. By evacuating colour of any descriptive, symbolic or expressive function, Richter deflates the claim to spiritual significance.' (Gaiger 2004, p.118). Colour choice was dictated by chance, with each placed in a random arrangement to create a diffused surface with an equal spread in colour relationships. Richter was interested in the neutral and systematic categorisation of the colours we can see and in conjunction with this, their coincidental appearance within the painting. In this way Richter was able to avoid the creation of a colour scheme or any outcome that could be considered representational, only having to dictate composition and material quality. The larger of Richter's *Colour Charts* (Fig. 5) also possess a panoramic format that consumes your field of vision. This quality resembles similarities to the work of James Turrell and Barnett Newman, two artists to be later referenced for colour's role becoming an all-encompassing entity in experience.

## Chapter 3. Roles of Colour Moving into Post-Conceptual Art

### 3.1 A Submersion in Colour

The relationship between colour and experience is problematised within certain forms of post-Conceptual art, questioning the relationship whilst making the viewer conscious of it. Looking at post-Conceptual artist James Turrell, it becomes clear that his installations revolve around experience and the viewer's complete submersion within a colour field. In his *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6), light and colour inform the environment rather than acting to describe a particular shape. Colour encompasses its surroundings rather than being contained, thus demonstrating a direct opposition of the unbreakable relationship between colour and form previously discussed in the work of Matisse and Albers. This works to highlight colour's role in perceptual experience, engaging the spectator with 'limits and wonder of human perception', showing how we 'internally create colours we see' and 'our perceived reality' of them (James Turrell, 2019). The notion of experience being a role of colour in post-Conceptualism increases the importance of the role of the viewer. Gallery audiences now have an active role in the production of meaning in an artwork, with a shift in viewer participation from 'passive contemplation' to 'active participation' (Manasseh 2010, p.1). According to David Joselit post-Conceptual art has a 'tendency toward interactivity' (Joselit 2013, p.167), reinforcing the idea of experience of colour within Turrell's post-Conceptualist practice, but is something that seems strongly prevalent in contemporary art also. Colour through Turrell has the capacity to overwhelm sensory experience, putting the audience in a position where they become disembodied in a large expanse of unidentified hue. The role of colour being a pathway of experience is true within James Turrell's practice because of the anonymity surrounding his colour; it has the power to completely isolate and transport the viewer, devoid of any other connections.



Figure 6. James Turrell, *Breathing Light*, 2013.

The role and application of light is of great significance for James Turrell in creating immersive environments, seeking to achieve with light solely what previous artists have traditionally attempted to depict with a paintbrush. Looking back at the discussion of religion and its influence on traditional roles of colour, a link could be made between the transcendental aspects and power of colour in Turrell's *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6), as reliant on the 'God' given light; however it appears Turrell moves past this manifestation, into colour as material and experience. Architecture is used to frame the coloured light in order to directly confront viewer perception and identify the visual illusion that light as a medium can create. The architecture acts to contain colour in a specific and controlled area in order to confront human perception; removal of such would lead to the dispersion of light and thus a less intense effect. In the practice of Turrell the relationship between form and colour moves into a new dimension, away from obvious outlines and into the merging of coloured light and architectural space. Comparable to the paper *Cut Outs* (Figs.3 & 4) of Matisse colour is confined to a certain area, however the

edges of confinement now translate to the walls of the room in which the light encompasses. Thus, the boundaries between colour and form become blurred. The use of light and through so colour as material, is a signifier of the post-Conceptualist ideas behind Turrell's work, as there is no physical element in the coloured light present within the *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6). Viewer perception and logic means colour must be taken as phenomenological material and experience, with a frustration in being surrounded by such an intense sensation without ever being able to fully grasp it in your hands.

Turrell introduces light into an environment in a multitude of ways to experiment with different visual effects. In his *Ganzfelds* (Fig.6) fluorescent light sources are hidden behind partition walls, whereas in his *Veils* light is introduced from above. The idea of light acting as a physical material used to create art is indicative of Turrell's practice centring in post-Conceptualism, as his practice becomes ruled by concept as of a lacking visual resource. Looking back at the discussion of post-Conceptualism as stated by Michael Newman in *After Conceptual Art: Joe Scanlan's Nesting Bookcases, Duchamp, Design and the Impossibility of Disappearing* (1999), James Turrell's installations show a similarity in the idea of 'the alignment of the desire to disappear with the acknowledgement of the impossibility of disappearing.' (Newman and Bird, 1999, p.206). This is due to coloured light becoming the sole element within the room, after a period of adjustment in one of Turrell's experiences, colour although present becomes imperceptible. This link between Turrell and post-Conceptualism extends to an objectless artwork with coloured light becoming the objective perception. This fascination with light stems from inspiration drawn from primary, sensory experiences. Light bouncing off of water, flooding through cracks between trees, 'situations where you can literally feel the fluid quality of the light.' Brown (1985, quoted in Govan and Kim 2013, p.121). It can be inferred that Turrell's *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6) are therefore different kinds of landscapes that focus and reinterpret the light of the natural world. Turrell uses light in a way that makes you feel it physically, and

in his own words: 'I like the quality of feeling that is felt not only with the eyes.' Brown (quoted in Govan and Kim 2013, p.101). Referring back, this feeling outside of the eyes could be in reference to the idea of a role of colour being an experience rather than something to look at in a standard format.

When considering the relationship between colour and experience as a role of colour within post-Conceptual art, and discussing the work of James Turrell and the name of the *Ganzfelds* (Fig.6) series, it becomes obvious of the importance of the Ganzfeld Effect. This effect refers to the mind attempting to pinpoint architectural components within an environment such as the walls, floor, edges and joins, but its inability to do so. Although the logical mind attempts to locate these fragments it will be unsuccessful, 'Ganzfeld is constructed seamlessly so that the eyes cannot focus on anything.' (Govan and Kim 2013, p.250). Being unable to focus on your surroundings causes a perception deprivation of indeterminable space. The Ganzfeld Effect is most associated with a uniformed field of colour, which is very fitting to the *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6). Turrell's use of light as colour to flood the room evokes this visual effect, causing a loss of vision and altered state of consciousness in the viewer. Turrell's visual experiences pinpoint how easily we misperceive our environment; normal conventions of perception are thrown out of the window leaving light and thus colour to develop into an essence of seeing. Uncertainty through the collapse of vision acts to heighten the audience's experience and in the work of Turrell, their experience within coloured light.

The work of James Turrell and its capacity to overwhelm sensory experience shows association to Colour Field Painters, a branch of Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism sought to convey emotion through abstraction, and 'invented new idioms of abstract art to communicate their deepest feelings.' (Phillips 2012, p. 78). Moving into the subdivision of Colour Field Painting within Abstract Expressionism, Colour Field artists painted large areas

of unbroken colour without any suggestion of figuration in order to heighten the expressive nature of colour. Art critic Clement Greenberg was especially supportive of the Colour Field Painters, claiming it achieved monumental advances when it came to composition and form. Colour Field artist Barnett Newman is a prime example of an artist who used colour in such a format, creating 'zip' paintings in which the use of a vertical line would separate colour field areas; the line functioned as a boundary between multiple different metaphysical realms. The compositions are forms of thought used for powerful experience in the encounter with the sublime. The opposition of figure and ground into the abstract expansion of colour field, up close creates a visual sensory experience in which viewers looking at his largest paintings from a very short distance would experience colour occupying their whole field of vision. When compared to Turrell's post-Conceptual handling of colour with pure and uninterrupted coloured light as a medium, a concept of 'no object, no image and no focus' is created within his installations, showing links to the concept of colour being used to create a perceptual experience (James Turrell, 2019). Turrell's work allows the audience to experience disorientating, un-interrupted fields of pure colour, engaging the spectator with 'limits and wonder of human perception', and thus shows how we 'internally create colours we see' and 'our perceived reality' of them (James Turrell, 2019). As his work has 'no object, nor image and no focus' it leads you to question what you're looking at; according to Turrell you are 'looking at you looking. What is important to me is to create an experience of wordless thought' (James Turrell, 2019). The phrase 'wordless thought' is indicative in relation to the inadequacy between colour and language; James Turrell embraces this inadequacy celebrating colour as pure experience.

Within Turrell's experiences light, colour and form blend into one. This seems to be a pivotal and successful role in Turrell's practice, attempting to have colour and light inhabit a space whilst not being reduced by form. As the relationship between colour, light and experience are

key to his practice, the relation between colour and form is reduced, highlighting how the relationship could be a possible role of colour within post-Conceptual art. Previously discussed, it appeared that the two subjects were eternally bound, with the dominance in relationship traditionally being placed on form over colour. However with a step towards post-Conceptualism, this dominance appears to have shifted into a more even play between the two. What drastically altered the relationship was the introduction of ‘non-representational’ painting through the ‘removal of traditional subject matter’, and through this removal ‘Colour became a subject; it was what viewers looked for in a painting’ (Gage 2006, p.101-104). Turrell moves away from the issues that faced pre-Conceptual artists including Josef Albers, Kenneth Noland and Gene Davis who became limited by paint. Despite the search for a formless entity in which colour could become the sole focus, the presence of this relationship still comes into play, caused by the objective, physicality of a painting; it is something within grasp as it has a materiality. However a move to the post-Conceptualist practice of Turrell who uses coloured light to create immersive experiences, and this relationship between colour and form begins to disperse. James Turrell’s *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6) cause the audience to lose a sense of surrounding and the ability to distinguish form.

### 3.2 Colour Psychology and Retina Disturbance

In establishing the post-Conceptual relationship between colour and light to act as an immersive experience in a move away from the relation to form, the practice of Carlos-Cruz Diez seems pivotal to consider. The relationship between colour and emotion makes an appearance within the practice of Cruz-Diez, who holds belief of an underlying emotional message embedded within colour, ‘I have strived to make color a life experience, capable of producing an emotional impact that would go beyond the act of mere painting.’ (Cruz-Diez et al 2009, p.9). The concept of the relationship between colour and emotion relates back to the discussion of Henri Matisse’s provocation of emotion through colour. Although both artists



endeavour to evoke an emotional response, colour role in relation to emotion differs between the two. Whilst Matisse's practice focuses on its role as a form of self-expression, Cruz-Diez holds a belief of art as communication, with the hope to create an interaction between artwork and audience. The evocation of emotion is developed through the post-Conceptualist ideas of Cruz-Diez, in which it becomes less about rendering his own associations to the artwork, in an attempt to address and create a dialogue of communication through felt experience. Looking back at the *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6) of James Turrell, comparisons are drawable through both artists' use of light in encompassing a physical space. The relationship between colour and experience stems from colour psychology, theory which concludes that colour holds the ability to evoke emotions and associations, determining human behaviour. John Gage draws attention to such within *Colour in Art* (2006), regarding colour as a powerful communicative tool, utilised to evoke a physiological reaction in viewer, 'Yet it is precisely the uncertainties and instability in the interpretation of the effects of colours that fit them especially for the expression of unstable emotions.' (Gage 2006, p.83). Physiological reaction is derivative of associative factors, for example the association of red with passion and danger. However, these emotive associations can change and are largely influenced by cultural differences. In Western culture the colour white holds associations with the divine, purity and innocence, whereas in many Eastern countries white is considered to be the colour of mourning. Thus the use of colour, including white, within an artwork will evoke contrasting emotions for different viewers. Through reference to these ideas of colour psychology, colour takes on a role for Cruz-Diez that attempts to create a relationship between art and human experience, 'Connections or emotional associations established by viewers result from a dialogue that arises between them and the work they are observing.' (Cruz-Diez et al. 2009, p.11).

The role of colour becomes the main basis for Cruz-Diez's post-Conceptual practice. Looking back at the chromophobia so prevalent within art history, Cruz-Diez too faces this fear within

his own practice, ‘This is why I was anxious to give color a main role in my work, as it is a specific and fundamental instrument of painting’... ‘My intention was to highlight the important and enjoyment of the “pictorial” experience, free from any other connotation’ (Cruz-Diez et al. 2009, p.11), reiterating the fearful unknowable nature of colour, however this time having a resonating fear due to its fundamentality within an art image. The ephemeral nature of colour reiterates its unstable state which only encourages chromophobia; however it is the ephemeral quality of colour that drives Carlos Cruz-Diez’s *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7), creating experiences in which colour can be viewed as both an event that is in constant flux, and as a ‘circumstance in time and space.’ (Cruz-Diez et al. 2009, p.13). The role of colour within Cruz-Diez’s practice attempts to reveal colour’s nature and its relationship and effect upon us as humans.

Although the predominant subject within all of Carlos Cruz-Diez’s practice is colour, it is within his *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7) that the role of colour as experience becomes most significant. Cruz-Diez’s *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7) began in the 1960’s and continue on into the present as both a post-Conceptual and contemporary exploration. The works are phenomenological situations freed of any form of composition allowing colour to dictate and suffocate space, creating an instability in viewer perception. The *Chromosaturations* (Fig.7) consist of 3 artificial environments in which white rooms are flooded with coloured light in so becoming colour chambers. Each room is a different colour: one red, one green and the final blue, colours corresponding to the basic colours of light. Each monochromatic environment allows the eye to adjust, in which the colour of the room (that being red, green or blue) can then be read as white as your eye compensates. As the viewer moves to the next monochromatic room, retina disturbance is experienced as the eye is adjusted to the previous colour, making the viewer self-aware and allowing them to become accustomed to receiving a range of colours simultaneously. The autonomous *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7) evoke in the viewer reactions

that they wouldn't be able to perceive in normal viewing conditions, thus there is an analytical concept underlying the *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7). Comparing back to the *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6) of James Turrell, a completely different conceptual basis is created through the use of coloured light, with Cruz-Diez's work being analytical as of making the viewer aware of the physiology in colour vision, compared to the disembodied experience of Turrell's *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6). Although the two artists demonstrate that coloured light can consider separate concepts, the notion of colour as material resonates between the two practices, 'activating in the viewer the notion of color as a material or physical situation, going into space without the aid of any form or even without any support' (Carlos Cruz-Diez, 2019). The move into colour as material inadvertently moves away from colour's submissive role in the relationship with form, as the *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7) are Cruz-Diez's attempt to colour space as an alternative.



Figure 7. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Chromosaturations*: 2000 – 2009, 2003.

### 3.3 The Material Quality of Colour

The final post-Conceptual artist in discussion of the argument of the new roles of colour in post-Conceptual art is Peter Halley. The paintings of Halley relate to the space and time in which he exists, utilising forms resembling architectural structures, cells, batteries and computers. Living in New York in the 1980's meant subsequently that Halley used 'the language of geometric abstraction to describe the actual geometricized space around him' (Guggenheim, 2019), and through this geometrical confinement, also began to look at the connections between the notions of imprisoned space, prevalent in the borders between his colours.

The post-Conceptual paintings of Peter Halley offer a different role of colour from the practices of Cruz-Diez and Turrell, with a move away from immersive experience. Like much of post-Conceptual art, Halley's practice moved away from 'the literals to something more intuitive.' through 'a development of colors used and formal elements explored' (Halley et al 2000, p.51). Acknowledging Josef Albers' studies into the interaction of colours, and the 'readymade' ideologies of Marcel Duchamp, Halley took a post-Conceptualist standpoint in understanding the importance of acquiring a comprehensible methodology in order to proceed in art. Halley's paintings take a step forward, playing with the relationship between colour, form and texture; recognising 'social analysis' whilst at the same time preserving a need for 'metaphysical silence' (Halley et al 2000, p.158). Through the differing applications of paint and surface texture we return to the idea of colour as material, offering an alternative to the immersive experiences that Cruz-Diez and Turrell imparted.

Through use of everyday DIY materials, Halley makes reference to a state of Conceptualism in the ideologies of the Duchampian 'readymade'. Day-Glo paint and Roll-A-Tex are heavily utilised to impart both a static, visual sensation and something physical and architectural, to

make reference back to the basis of the architectural structure and geometrical confinement within his practice. Through such the sense of colour as material is made apparent in the contrasting qualities of flat and textured. Unlike the practices of Turrell and Cruz-Diez, Peter Halley is able to conjure an idea of colour as material through paint, providing a solution to the problem of form faced by pre-Conceptual artists previously discussed. Consequently, a playful relationship between shape, colour and surface quality is achieved. Although Halley makes various links to the architectural and digital world there is no specific message conveyed, instead he encourages the spectator to try and ‘appreciate the composition, the combinations of its colours and forms.’ (Halley et al 2000, p.50), returning to the material quality of the paint. The exploitation of colour to create optical effects, in turn highlights the powerful nature of colour: ‘his interest in the juxtaposition of colors and its visual effect reminds us of his early experience of Albers.’ (Halley et al 2000, p.52). Acknowledgment to the experiments of Albers highlights the developed, post-Conceptualist understanding of colour. Unlike the Conceptualists, who dismissed its importance and returned to a chromophobic state of mind, Halley acknowledged Albers’ findings interpreting them to suit his practice. Post-Conceptualism thus, was not a return to an Albers way of thinking, but an acknowledgement of previous methodologies, interpreting them to suit new developing ideas of colour.

Absurdist colour is applied through the use of rollers. The benefit being rollers are able to achieve both flat unmodulated and static expansions of colour, and a heavy stucco surface, due to Halley’s belief that the true success to an artwork lies in the tactile feel of the surface of the painting. This approach is demonstrated in *A Monstrous Paradox* 1989 (Fig. 8), and in all of Peter Halley’s paintings alike.

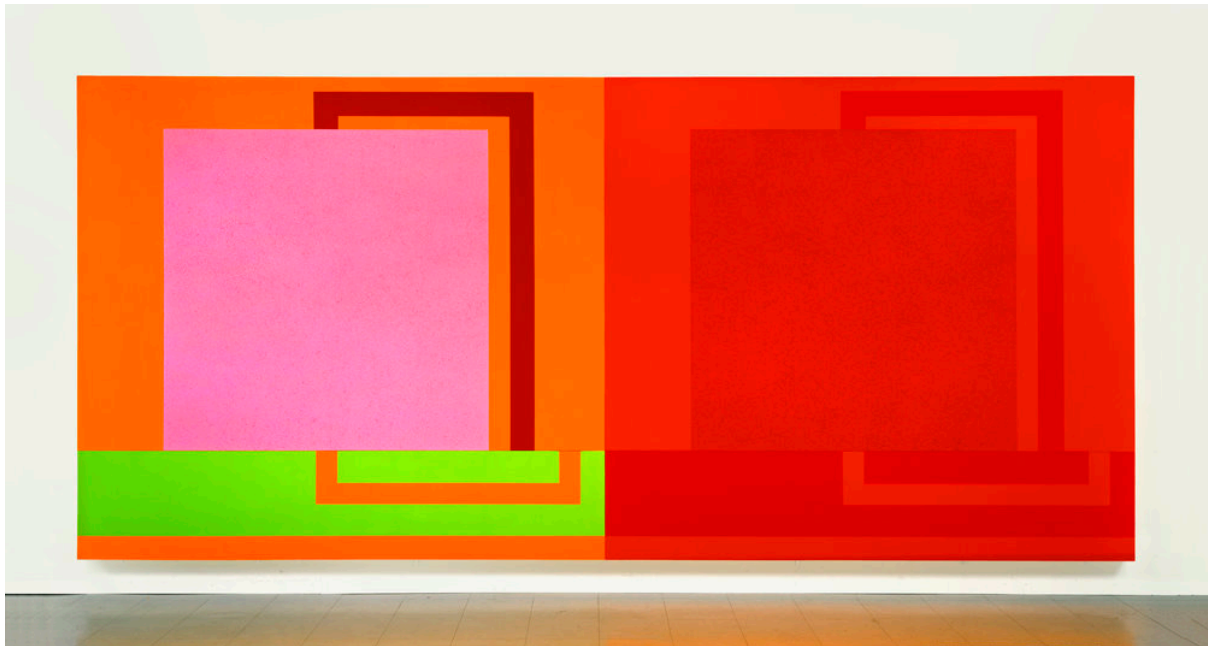


Figure 8. Peter Halley, *A Monstrous Paradox*, 1989, 229.24 x 495.3 cm, acrylic, fluorescent acrylic and Roll-a-Tex on canvas.

It is clear to see on the surface of the painting the play back and forth between static and active. Colour is imparted to keep the eye moving. Whilst colours of a similar nature are used in majority, Halley then comes in with a Day-Glo fluorescent green to provoke the image, adding to the surface tension already prevalent in the combination of flat and stucco. Within *Colour* (2006), Edith Anderson Feisner makes reference to emotion focusing on the psychological effect of colour combinations. Sharp contrasts in colour produces the effects of precision, objectivity and firmness; whilst close values produce feelings of haziness, indeterminacy, rest and introspection (Anderson Feisner 2006, p.42). It appears as though Halley takes similar notes under consideration within *A Monstrous Paradox* (Fig. 8) by imparting a subdued feeling on the right half of the painting, to then be interrupted by bold, sharp contrasts on the left-hand side. This acts to enhance surface tension within the painting, which could be argued extorts a sense of uneasiness and uncertainty within the spectator. Considering the writing of Edith Anderson Feisner, comparisons back to the practices of Turrell and Cruz-Diez can be made. Whilst James Turrell's *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6) impart a feeling upon the audience of disorientation through loss of depth perception and total absorption into a world of

unmodulated colour hue, as demonstrated on the right half of Halley's painting; Cruz-Diez's *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7) show closer links to the left-hand side of the painting, causing retina disturbance through sharp contrasts in which the viewer must adjust, and in so becomes self-aware. A role plays out through the subjective reactions of Halley's colour choices, 'colors nevertheless deployed to unconventionally attractive effect, or in some cases to a purposively achieved and stinging ugliness.' (Halley et al 2000, p.154). The different effects of colour application within *A Monstrous Paradox* (Fig. 8), as well as in the majority of Halley's paintings, works to undermine the clarity of his geometric structures, putting tension on top of one another.

## Conclusion

Returning back to the appropriately titled *A Monstrous Paradox* 1989 (Fig. 8), colour in itself possesses paradoxical qualities. Often with a paradox people will attempt to solve it; some paradoxes can be solved in which case they were never a paradox to begin with. In the case of colour this is almost impossible, despite discussing several possible roles for colour within art, each has to be subjectively considered acknowledging the impossibility of an objective and definitive definition. However, if you can state the paradox it is often more useful than trying to resolve it in the first place, the paradox thus in this instance tells us what's at stake in the use and roles of colour. Throughout this thesis, an attempt is made to set colour free from its confines, but at the same time it is discussed in the attempt for it to do something, to serve a function. There's a tension between the two demands we make of colour even if colour is not quite a paradox. This is prevalent in Halley's *A Monstorous Paradox* 1989 (Fig. 8), where on one side the colour contrast is so distinctive that it causes retina disturbance, whilst on the other the contrast is almost invisible. The distinction between different colours shifts constantly, aggressive in certain areas but paired with colour field that threatens to obliterate visual articulation of form. Considering colour to be paradoxical adheres to the unknowing nature and power that colour possesses. Another insinuation of the paradox lies in colour belonging to form. Where colour is led and constrained by line and tone in tradition there is the implication that it is still a thing to be controlled and disciplined, coming back to the concept of 'chromophobia' established by Batchelor (2000). Colour belongs to the entire visual field and possesses the power to both differentiate and homogenize. Colour is our representation of the world, it is the world. If we want to understand our phenomenological relation to the world, we have to approach and acknowledge this through colour.

This essay set out to answer the question of the new roles of colour in post-Conceptual art. In order to answer this question a basis in the history of colour and its role within art had to be



established, in order to lay the groundwork from which comparisons could be drawn. The process of comparison became fundamental in evidencing the new roles of colour within art, due to colour possessing this paradoxical essence. Through research it became clear that it is unlikely that colour will ever be a subject that can be fully uncovered and understood, but it is in this uncertainty that ideas are kept fresh, allowing artists to manipulate colour in a way to suit their conceptual basis. This was a heavy consideration in the final chapter of the essay, in which a focus was put upon the relationship between colour and experience through the use of coloured light; the *Ganzfelds* (Fig. 6) of Turrell and *Chromosaturations* (Fig. 7) of Cruz-Diez referenced in as prime examples. This uncovered a physical relationship we possess with colour and its effects on human perception through the ideas of colour psychology. Developed understanding in post-Conceptualism was made possible through colour experiments, including the findings of Josef Albers discussed in chapter two, which liberated colour from its confines and the implication of it as ‘ornamental’, as referenced in the first chapter (Bleicher 2005, p.20). As colour was, and still is such a complex phenomenon it holds endless applications to art way past the verbal capabilities of one essay. A focus here is placed upon its roles in relation to post-Conceptualism as it is not unreasonable to suggest that this marked a turning point that can be directly translated to colour use in contemporary art practice.

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