

Hot - Grey

David Kloosterboer - VAV4 - Rietveld Academy

Introduction

Chromophobia

The Dreamlike and The Uncanny

The Cosmetic and Moby Dick

Obtaining New Colours

Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis explores theories, thoughts and poetics that impact humans' perception of colour. Through scientific, psychological and artistic viewpoints, I aim to reaffirm awareness about the energy and weight of colour (and its absence) for artists and viewers.

The sources I use for this thesis include; books and the perspective of a few contemporary artists, writers and philosophers of different areas. I share my own thoughts dissecting those sources. Using a lateral approach, not to discredit experts but to level the playing field to a versatile range of experts from different fields of knowledge. Writing about colour might also sound strange as it is so elusive and at the same time self-evident. Is colour cosmetic? Is it experiential? Is there colour harmony, or is colour harmony quite arbitrary? Is there an obsessive focus on white on eradication of colour as an shape of elitist taste?

This thesis is an attempt to offset the danger of a world which seems to be filled with a white and grey drab, one where material and shape are the only ones remaining and society at large seems to disregard the emotive and imaginary power that colour can have.

The title of the thesis comes from a question by Ludwig Wittgenstein; “Can we Imagine a hot grey?” It's from the book ‘Remarks on Colour’ most of the writings in the book are about observations of small everyday moments, for instance; how the light reflects in coffee and how that made him think of brown in relation to chocolate and the difference of surface and how that gives a mood.

Colour in this example is whole with that object, substance or form, but also enhances the imaginative aspect of the viewer towards the coloured thing. In the question however one might wonder if grey can be attractive, it is a known as dull colour, a buzz killer. A mix of both black and white. Opposite to imagining a hot grey as an object. Maybe grey or white hangs around one as a cloud. The void... either total darkness of space, or total whiteness of a gallery space, but also of heaven and hell.

In films delirium is often shown by shaky vision or hallucination. Without the ability to see one is faced with a problem. How do you categorise the world without your vision? This also makes me wonder if we arrange, characterise, enjoy, disguise or feel disgusted by colour and why?

Chromophobia

Chromophobia is a term used by David Batchelor in his book ‘Chromophobia’ published in 2000. The term is partly invented, because there is no clinical chromophobia disease. However, Batchelor uses this term to point out a pattern in Western society to relegate colour to the infantile and cosmetic, which is strange because colour is very present in daily life.

In Batchelors book he argues that there has been a tradition of ‘chromophobia’ in culture and life. He talks about a house he visited in the south of Germany, where everything was either white, grey or black. He saw a certain awkwardness and hostility that the house contained and all the people and objects seemed unwelcome smudges on its presence. Its pride and character from the architect’s point of view had a historic background and Batchelor explores this history and tries to capture his own wonder at that willing exclusion and deprivation.

As he unravels the ridiculous notion that colour is against logic. As Aristotle argued that the world was in its essence white. For instance; when you burn wood, it becomes white dust. In part he believed the world in actuality is white in the core of every object. Colour is just a concealing of all that white material. Colour is made out to be a liar. Batchelor argues against that culturally constructed superstition.

“The notion that colour is bound up with the fate of Western culture sounds odd, and not very likely but this is what I want to argue: that colour has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture. For the most part, this prejudice is so all-embracing and generalised that, at one time or another, it has enrolled just about every other prejudice in this service. If its object were a furry animal, it would be protected by international law... It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that, in the West, since Antiquity, colour has been systematically marginalised, reviled, diminished and degraded. Generations of philosophers, artists, art historians and cultural theorists of one stripe or another have kept this prejudice alive, warm and well groomed. As with all prejudices, its manifest form, its loathing, masks a fear: a fear of containment and corruption by something that is unknown or appears unknowable. This loathing of colour, this fear of corruption through colour, needs a name: chromophobia.”

Chromophobia 22-3

Batchelor believes chromophobia manifests itself in two different ways:

1. *To make the colour a form of other; the oriental, feminine, queer, pathological. Colour as irrational and seemingly otherworldly. Or strangely enough almost the opposite:*
2. *The banal, the cosmetic, the superficial as it is part of another form of corruption just to numb the senses from the real important characteristics. Line, form and thought. It is just*

David Batchelor talks about subjects of control and fear by either using colour as design to make yourself more comfortable, often leading to eradication of colour, wearing mostly black and having mostly grey furniture and white walls. Being committed to materials keeping their original colour, choosing not to paint things.

Good taste as a sense of control. But partly he argues it is a way to exclude. As Julia Kristeva wrote “colour is the shattering of unity”. Batchelor sees colour as a separate entity of form and line, and its autonomy possibly threatens the desired narrative or message.

Colour becomes a dangerous fearful thing that should be left alone. Batchelor champions the many different meanings and uses of colour. He embraces its inescapability when making something and how it can absorb the context it is used in and simultaneously be independent. He partly embraces the prejudices and understands them through history, the sensorial bodily experience and what he calls ‘fall into colour’ or the cosmetic quality which is modulated in adverts, movie scenes, beautiful dresses and make-up.

The Dreamlike and the Uncanny

Colour as a veil of movement. An iridescent veil used to annoy the bourgeoisie. This might sound like I am talking about hippies! In some sense that might be true. The subject of the dreamlike is also an attempt of me to make this chapter about the impact of colour on one's inside, one's psychology as an individual and representation of the benefit of colour to the subconscious, but also the prejudice against colour and its apparent danger. The danger that looking at something might change you, And when overwhelmed with a stream of chaotic images, it leaves an imprint.

Some of the examples I bring up are either literature or films, The Wizard of Oz but also a book by Mike Kelley, called; 'Uncanny'. The book contains a few examples where colour is a sign of a different type of relation, either pathological or fetish. To see colour as psychological, a trigger for a dreamlike descent. Or on the surface a categorization and arraignment of one's fantasy. But also running counter to pathology and fetish, colour is seen as an emblem of ideals and encouragement, a desire to dream and chase.

As the cliché hippy also wears tie dyes and is rainbow coloured, they might dream of change and journey.

“We have no sense of direction. We drift. Hallucination follows hallucination. We are in confusion: ‘... we others from the centre of civilisation, are savages ...’ And then, as if by chance – although chance has no particular meaning in our dreamwork – we discover a destination, an awakening, a recovery which puts our dream into an envelope of rationality, like it did for poor Dorothy.” (Dorothy is the protagonist in the wizard of Oz)

Chromophobia P.43

“The moment of colour in the film of The Wizard of Oz occurs exactly 16 minutes and 50 seconds after the opening credits. And the grayscale landscape of Kansas is not so much modified by colour as utterly obliterated by it – for a while, at least. Notwithstanding how hard it may be for us now to imagine what it must have been like in 1939 to sit down to a black-and-white movie, only to be hurled after a few minutes into the hyperchromatic universe of Munchkinland”

The Luminous and the Grey, page 22, written by David Batchelor

In the chromatic dreamlike Munchkinland in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, the foreign is in this case the realm of a fantasy land where the normal rules don't seem to apply. Loss of the original environment which are the flat midwestern plains of Kansas. Colour gets exaggerated and loses its conformity, the apparent stability of greyness that is shaped as a picture of home and nostalgia. The outside in this case does influence the way the world is experienced. In the film, colour alone might as well have changed the rules of physics. The outside seemed to matter, not just as a shell in which the valuable mind is captured inside of it. In this case the opposite might be true, as the exaggerated colour is book ended by a world of black and white monochrome. Therefore colour is put down as supplementary and indulgent. And reality is bound by the monotone.

This is a reading on the film by Salmon Rushdie and a perspective on the song 'Over The Rainbow' which is featured in the film and how in the song is the dream and desire of leaving to a better place, Rushdie describes it as a 'hymn' of the 'uprooted self', a dream of travel: "The human dream of leaving, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots. At the heart of *The Wizard of Oz* is a great tension between these two dreams... In its most potent emotional moment, this is unarguably a film about the joys of going away, of leaving the greyness and entering the colour, of making a new life in the 'place where there isn't any trouble'. 'Over The Rainbow' is, or ought to be, the anthem of all the world's migrants, all those who go in search of the place

The artist *Mike Kelley*, wrote a book called 'Uncanny', where the pathology of colour and some of its history is discussed, but also the uncanny feeling that colour and bodies evoke.

Kelley explores memory, recollection, horror and anxiety through the juxtaposition of a highly personal collection of objects with realist figurative sculpture. Polychrome figurative sculptures that embody the feeling of the uncanny through their scale and use of colour, form and material. Kelley relates these to the idea of the 'double' – the disturbingly realistic representation of the human figure suspended between life and death. Non-art objects include a variety of historical and contemporary anatomical models, wax figures, animatronic puppets and mounted (stuffed) animals.

"Freud, however, took the uncanny to be a fully grown-up phenomenon that occurs when ideas and feelings from childhood that we thought we had discarded are triggered by some experience and so reassert themselves in our minds. By definition, only the enlightened adult is susceptible to uncanny sensations."

What is uncanny? Either describing it as a moment of creepy familiarity like your image in the mirror moving separately from you, or anyway thinking that for a second. This for me is more a memory out of my childhood, not an 'enlightened adult'. The uncanny seems to be from this description ordinary, not a scene, a moment or occurrence. Not horror but more absurd. In the book Kelly describes fetishes that involve dressing up, dolls and a pathology of candy coloured bliss. One example is Mrs. G.J, an older woman who secretly kept dolls and would brush their hair and play with them.

One day her husband came home and realised what was happening. Filled with jealousy and rage he threw all the dolls in the fireplace. And she fainted. "The woman was raised by an aunt who spoiled her to an unusual degree. The aunt died when the patient was thirteen and ever since then the girl has been fighting for the passing of the years." *Uncanny, P.17*

The dissecting of a body and a realistic depiction of limbs is also inherently uncanny to Kelley. One example is from a grave robber Ed Gein, who after his mother's passing developed the habit of finding graves from people his mother's age, digging up body parts, bringing them home and painting and decorating those limbs.

This sounds obviously disturbing, but it brings us closer to our understanding and perception of what is implicitly linked in an art context, a demarcation of 'wrong'. Realism devolves into horror, because we can imagine death. And anything that triggers that should not exist. Whatever tries to emulate life which is not alive will creep an average person out.

"To that end we must study to remake these images - No longer content with a puppet, we must create the über marionette. The über marionette will not compete with life."

Uncanny, P.15

In the lack of competition is a superstition that you should always make clear it is not entirely realistic. By paintings being flat, for instance, or sculpture in classical times being white. Ed Gein could not make that distinction, between actual life and decoration, art or dolls, seeing them as (imaginary) friends.

It is not common in Western art history to have polychrome (multicoloured) sculptures. Because of Neoclassicism, all sculptures were imagined in white. A Brunelleschi or Bernini has no colour. Since the Renaissance, colour has mostly been a painter's concern, as sculptors only deal with the colour of material. Now we actually know that Greek sculptures were often polychrome, but history forgot because all the colour eroded and now a new history had been established.

Kelley gives an example of this superstition for coloured sculpture in the West; “[...] in Beverly Hills, a wealthy city within the Los Angeles city limits. In the 1970s a mansion was purchased by *Mohammed Al-Fassi*. The sheikh decorated his house in a thorough garnish manner, including, for example, a row of copies of classical statuary painted naturalistically—right down to the pubic hair. These works initiated an on-going battle between Al-Fassi, his neighbours and city government that ended only when the house was burnt down by an arsonist.”

Uncanny, P.30

The decorations of Al-Fassi were a shock, created some local tabloid drama and aroused anger from the neighbours which were convinced these realistic coloured statues were degenerate and hideous.

“Falling or leaving: these two metaphors of colour are closely related. Their terminologies – of dreams, of joys, of uprootings or undoings of self – remain more or less the same. More than that, perhaps, the descent into colour often involves lateral as well as vertical displacement; it means being blown sideways at the same time as falling downwards.”

Chromophobia, P. 41

Colour seems to either affect sanity or it triggers hope and creates affectation. As the imagination gets stimulated or reality gets blurred. Falling in and out of colour is thus set in a psychological plane. The prejudice that colour can lead to a loss of self is evident in the text but also seeing colour as a sign of hope, hope to start a journey.

Colour can be perceived as something negative, as a proponent of chaos outside of one's own understanding into the troubled atmosphere of another person. The perceived instability of the other makes one carefully take a distance from the veil of colour. On the contrary, colour is a sign of hope, a rescue signal, the flowers blooming in spring or the colourful drawings of a child. Colour hints at ideas and images, these things get formulated in the psyche and/or rational mind much easier when colour is present. Therefore people embrace colour in small portions, but at the same time distance themselves from it. And hope it is either temporary, contained or supplementary.

The Wizard of Oz

Uncanny, Mike Kelley

Over The Rainbow

[verse 1]

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby*

[verse 2]

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true*

[bridge]

*Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me*

[verse 3]

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly
Birds fly over the rainbow
Why then, oh, why can't I?*

*If happy little bluebirds fly
Beyond the rainbow
Why, oh why can't I?*

The Cosmetic and Moby Dick

The prejudice against cosmetics is that content is not in the design or exterior. Ideas versus the non-vernacular image. Formulated thought declaring its disgust of picture, form and especially colour. I want to soften that prejudice to see meaning in the marking or beginning of what is outside, the shell, veil or border. Colour is partly a container, It is hard to imagine a zero of colour combined with a zero of form. In an existential way it would be strange to imagine nothing having any colour at all. Would there be something else replacing colour? Herman Melville wrote Moby dick but also wrote essays about the behaviour of colour and his own philosophical thoughts about colour.

“For Melville, the truth of colour is merely cosmetic; it contains ‘subtle deceits’; it is only ‘laid on from without’. But if nature ‘paints like a harlot’, it is not simply to seduce us, but to protect us in its seductions from ‘the charnel-house within’. We have to wear tinted spectacles; otherwise, what we might see will make us blind.”

Chromophobia 17, David Batchelor

“In Moby Dick, Melville refers to light, his colouring agent, as a ‘mystical cosmetic’.[...]

Figuratively, colour has always meant the less-than-true and the not-quite-real. The Latin *colorem* is related to *celare*, to hide or conceal; in Middle English ‘to colour’ is to embellish or adorn, to disguise, to render specious or plausible, to misrepresent. Colour, then, is arbitrary and unreal: mere make-up”

Chromophobia. p. 52

The ‘mystical cosmetic’ seems to be a conflicted term. Is it mystical or cosmetic? Mysticism could be a spiritual word. Maybe somebody that is enlightened or believes in another power outside of rationality and common-logic. The cosmetic on the other hand does not seem to be asking for a mysterious or complex explanation; it is a mere change that represents disguise or a façade, a mask that makes things appear more beautiful than in reality (make-up). It is a temporary not important beauty, possible fake-ness or a vulgar decoration of that oneness, wholeness. As potentially perceived as in chromophobia.

In Moby Dick they hunt the big white whale, the whale not having any colour at all, his skin being so bright it hurts to look at. The whale represents Ahab’s revenge, fear and obsession. The whiteness of the creature is physically endless and comes maybe close to an image of no colour at all.

If colour triggers animosity regarding your own body, any imperfections may seem hostile to you, and your own pimples need to bend to your will indefinitely as well. Chest, ears, nose hairs. You therefore should be careful judging. And probably allow a bit of this mystical, maybe non cosmetic intrusion.

Sometimes people seem to be bothered by not achieving an ideal, or atleast a realistic ideal of their appearance. Colour in clothes hides the body, But also decorates and can make a person subjectively more lively, stylish, and cool, basically all those things. Colour can also be the trickster, distraction or envelope in which you sit steady and from which you peer outside. Using one’s body in a performative context and combining that with the image of colour, you quickly see a jester.

The jester used to be the person that would inform the king, while mocking him, this was a dangerous job but important as during the mocking some critique got levelled and presented. But the critique was performed, the actions calculated in a very jolly and supposedly harmless fashion so as not to embarrass the subject, the king/queen too much. Well aware that if he did anger the king or queen too much he could be killed, so the job must have been essential to the performer. Maybe a gesture is therefore colourful. And this colourfulness eases your relation with judgement itself, your inner highness lifts his crown as says thankyou if you can act in sensitivity regarding colour.

But to go from one's own body one might look over towards one's immediate surroundings, the identity of space. The 'the charnel house within' is also outside oneself as space is a representation of community for example; schools and homes. Can we chip away at all the white paint jobs over the decades? Is there a form of chromophobia in architecture?

"At first, inside looked endless. Endless like an egg must look endless from the inside; endless because seamless, continuous, empty, uninterrupted. Or rather: uninterrupted. There is a difference. Uninterrupted might mean overlooked, passed by, inconspicuous, insignificant. Uninterruptible passes by you, renders you inconspicuous and insignificant."

Chromophobia. P.9

The house is at its core drenched in a burning white that suppresses nature into hierarchy. One of measure, balance and above all purity. One of decision and rejection. Batchelor was put off by the stern choices and felt it looked partly lifeless and made himself feel negligible, as a pion. The surface of the walls and decorations and level of balance, of nothing being colourful or just annoying. It made him feel out of place. Would he tip off the balance and become a nuisance. Like being in an empty grey square, where it was supposed to be intimate, it was now hollowed out, and replaced by grey and white status symbols. Life was sucked out of the place, it was a strange encounter you could imagine. When you yourself suddenly notice. . . that there is no colour at all!

The opposite can also be argued: Theo van Doesburg, a Dutch painter, architect and designer, wrote a manifesto in 1929 championing the clarity of white, the amount of space white gives and its modernity. Especially pure white, not creme, nor white with a slight tint. But pure white. White that puts and arranges and recedes to the background. It's the origin, in some sense, of the 'White Cube'. The hope of its design qualities would provide a naked room removed from tradition and class.

A neutral space. In 1900-1960 it represented a modern space, a space whose identity would be interchangeable, based on an ethos of clarity and 'less is more'. Bachelor calls this 'Voluntary Poverty'. Now you can question if it actually did make those distinctions and whether it is truly neutral. I think in the end it did represent class to a degree, and makes for a similarity in the rooms on a worldscale, superseding tradition, making homogeneity of the colour in space a real danger. Universal through eradication of any other colour.

Modernism on a global scale regarding colour makes the spatial and traditions of the culture and intimacy negligibly. The warmth of colour and the lack of logic colour are in this case subservient. Therefore colour is limp, and classless. But hopefully colour will come back and with our logical modernism they can coexist. Towards a new view on colour.

Towards White Painting

(*Theo Van Doesburg poem/manifesto*)

“Brown,” ‘blue’ and ‘white’ correctly express the three phases of the development of humanity and all of its activities: science, art, religion, technology and architecture.

WHITE This is the spiritual colour of our times, the clearness which directs all our actions. It is neither grey nor ivory white, but pure white.

WHITE This is the colour of modern times, the colour which dissipates a whole era; our era is one of perfection, purity and certitude.

WHITE it includes everything.

We have superseded both the ‘brown’ of decadence and classicism and the ‘blue’ of divisionism, the cult of blue sky, the gods with green beards and the spectrum.

White pure white.

Looking around us we only see manure, and it is in the manure that filth and microbes live.

Let them amuse themselves, down there in the depths; we want more, we want to mount the heights of truth where the air is pure and can be withstood only by metallic lungs[...]”

Henri Michaux, artist, poet and acid-head. Had a different understanding of white than Van Doesburg did, here white seems the end, like death or heaven, he wrote this while seeing snow in the himalayas as it surrounded his vision:

“And ‘white’ appears. Absolute white.

White beyond all whiteness.

White of the coming of white.

White without compromise, through exclusion, through total eradication of non-white.

Insane, enraged white, screaming with whiteness.

Fanatical, furious, riddling the victim.

Horrible electric white, implacable, murderous.

White in bursts of white.

God of ‘white’.

No, not a god, a howler monkey.

(Let’s hope my cells don’t blow apart.)

Photograph, Project White
Scapes, David Batchelor

Moby Dick

Obtaining New Colours

Contemporary artist and art-writer Amy Sillman mentions in her book *Faux Pax*(2020) that an art-theory friend of hers told her this; “colour is the name given to forces that allow us to confront the uneasy task of marking differences.” which she agrees with and responds to by saying “colour marks value, regional art, gender, pathology, lust, shame, humour, camp, excess, vulgarity and bad taste.” Seeing colour, naming it and giving it a place in your own way, judging it. Probably it will fit in one of those boxes. Which makes sense from a viewpoint of mapping and understanding. At least a rational kind of sense. Obtaining, collecting and knowing.

However, colour keeps evading precise determination, regardless of its physical and scientific qualities, like the mineral or chemical composition, or the way light reacts to the colour. Colour seems to be, besides the physical attributes, also psychological and cultural. What do you think of that colour? It is not easy to explain, or put into words, it works or it doesn't.

Language does not cover the nature of colour as it is sensorial. Sillman's book is called *Faux Pax*, translated from French it means misstep, but it is also used as a saying for when a socially awkward moment occurs. A social misstep. Sillman chose this title referencing talking about colour which she sees as almost one of the hardest and awkward or banal things, It seems private. She compares it to talking about sex. Colour can be a stranger to language.

The philosopher and art-critic Charles le blanc concluded that because colour and language are unmarriageable, colour must not be as important as line and form. As line and form are the purest way to express oneself and show intelligence: “Intelligent beings have a language represented by articulate sounds; organised beings, like all animals and vegetables, express themselves by cries or forms, contour or carriage. Inorganic nature has only the language of colour. It is by colour alone that a certain stone tells us it is a sapphire or an emerald . . . Colour, then, is the peculiar characteristic of the lower forms of nature, while drawing becomes the medium of expression, more and more dominant, the higher we rise in the scale of being.”

Chromophobia, P.25, Charles le Blanc

Colour in the text being relegated as ‘lower forms of nature’ and ‘peculiar’. Sillman however disagrees. Sillman finds herself together with Josef Albers (who will come up later), with the difficulty of either the phenomenology of colour and the systematisation of colour, both potentially aiming for subjective harmony. Harmony of colour meaning that each visual stimulus relates to one another in a pleasant way or if not pleasant a correct way, or right way.

Sillman writes about art supply shops. Those are very important for the painter. If the paint matters to the painter, it is almost like a drug, Sillman uses the German word *handlung*, which means action, deed or plotline. However it is also used, for instance, as a book-handlung or art supply-handlung. *Handlung* then means shop. She draws this metaphor as the art supply shop as an action. Like painting itself is. And an essential difference between curators and artists is this experience with the material and the excitement of buying your goodies, which are tubes, brushes and canvases for a painter.

“I once asked a conceptually-minded curator why she loved Richard Serra’s work. She said, “because his work is phenomenological.” I was like, “what?” For the artist there is no art that is not essentially phenomenological. [...] After handling the various pigments for a short time, you get to know them almost like characters: Naples yellow is turgid; chromium oxide green is overbearing; flake white has a dry indifference; phthalo blue seems a little sleazy, and then ends up dominating everything else; king’s blue looks good at first but is kind of tacky.”

Faux pax, Amy Sillman P. 49-50

I don’t think generally, that all artists today know the difference between those paints, or the weights of every tube or the names given to every tube. But hopefully sometimes the way that those paints behave. Painters today must still care and have knowledge of the vibrancy and effect of a paint. The character of paint you use is very important for a painting. One cares for the surface of a painting like it is skin. It is hyperbolically an extension of life. A phenomenon denotes an intrinsic characteristic of a certain event, substance or experiment; it is often universal.

Phenomenological is denoting or relating to an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience. If painting is an experiment it is also phenomenological, it can breathe character. The ‘*handlung*’ also expands into the care and behaviour of going, collecting and finally ending up in your studio. Then comes the waiting and then the moving, either from the wrist or the elbow and shoulder, or using the whole body.

Abstraction is always a hassle at least, I believe when looking at abstract Harmony, a figurative image is still an abstract one as well, because it is essentially flat, so it must adhere to the character of colour and notice it.

“In early 1856 a young chemist, the eighteen-year-old William Perkin, was conducting experiments on coal-tar residue in a makeshift laboratory at his parents’ home on the corner of Cable street in East London. He was hoping to synthesise quinine following the research of his mentor, the organic chemist August Wilhelm von Hofmann. Perkin failed in his quest, but in the process he stumbled upon something else: mauve. That is, he had inadvertently discovered the first synthetic dye. [...] Within a few years an entire synthetic rainbow has been coaxed out of this viscous black residue of industrialization. By the first decade of the twentieth century over 2,000 colours had been isolated; by 1939 over 7,500 synthetic colours had been listed.”

Luminous and the grey p. 36, David Batchelor

This new colour had an impact on the world. A lot more synthetic dyes were made and colour became less expensive over time. The colour mauve which came from coal tar, was worn in 1858 by Queen Victoria to the wedding of her daughter, this was just the beginning of the use and popularity of synthetic dyes. These synthetic dyes made the old ways of making dyes in an industrial way redundant, they often took a lot of work and had to be shipped from all over the world. For instance indigo factories in India which produced a lot of indigo, mostly disappeared over time and were replaced by chemically made paints in factories.

Josef Albers was a student at Bauhaus taught by another colour theorist Johannes Itten. Albers fled in 1933 to the United States and became head of the painting department at Black Mountain College. His theory revolves around relational colour theory, one where every single colour reacts differently depending on the colours around that one colour.

“Albers addressed fifty years ago in the introduction of *Interactive Color* (1963). Albers declared that in his book he would be doing something radical: reversing the normal academic order - putting practise before theory, making subjective experience primary to understanding color.”

Faux Pax. P.47. Amy Sillman

Harmony, as Albers says, is a constellation people seem to want to attain in colour as harmony in colour provides a surface that is comparable to music tuned to the piece, or experience. The colour wheel that has been made and the ideas of contrast are mere attempts at a system that helps to have more harmony in a composition. Albers also says these systems can be misleading;

“[...] colour combinations seems unavoidable and appropriate. Although a comparison of composed colours with composed tones is very challenging, it should be mentioned that, while it can be helpful, it is often misleading. This is because different basic conditions of these media result in different behaviour.”

Josef Albers, Colour, David Batchelor

The subtractive colour spectrum arranges colour in primary, secondary and tertiary colours, and defines complementaries and contrast. Colour harmony is complicated because there are factors at play that determine a difference in its quality. In one way the physical nature of the colour is dependent on surface and light and in another sense the experience of the viewer, either because of one's preferences or looking at it up close, comparing and tuning.

Tonal differences can be huge, there are around a 1000 tonal differences per colour. So obviously one might take their time if they want harmony, subjectively or as objectively as possible. Therefore those systems provide us with at least some reference. It does not tell us the strength of a pigment, the way it covers an area or if the paint is very vibrant, glossy or matt. how much light a colour for instance absorbs. In a way these colour systems then seem superfluous.

The future of colour and paint is partly in attitude. Instead of the spectrum's objectivity. Colours are potentially different than expected. Mixing and shifting its character, It is a stern melting pot. Looking either for character or harmony, for clumsiness, or emotion.

It is a necessity to find and touch and see, notice differences. One must peer and see, the changes subsequently change the objective nature of the world into an associative one, the attitude provides for maybe more imagination or awareness, therefore seeing things you had never seen. Obtaining new

However it is also true that the changes of science affecting paint made synthetic paint more available. Colour became part of everyday commerce, in its synthetic rainbow of plastics. The painted surface is also in service of the new changes in paint and seeing paint as a commodity, driving new forms of application and experimentation, a new spectrum is always on the horizon. Conversely the mineral dyes made from certain materials which had a certain value were put off by the market and science, therefore oil paint is in part a niche, a material one could see slightly defiant, hanging on the old bedrocks of its history. Bound up in ancient formulas, that however were scientific revelations back then. (Indian yellow made out of cow piss which was fed with dried mango. Or indigo made in vats and processed for months.)

The 'Handlung' of all the art students, artists and hobbyists. Happily squeezing tubes, touching paper, rubbing erasers and pressing ballpoints and pencils, seems an activity to stay and renew itself, combined with the industrial technologies of brand new coatings and transparencies and glosses.

Therefore there are two truths about paint: one is that of awareness, you can relate colours and they have imaginative quality. The other truth is that of change and scientific progress which will affect the material relations in society at large in either industrial processes or local art-shops, which affects making.

Ken Nordine worked as a radio commentator and voiced a paint commercial. Inspired by his own work with the commercial, he made these poems all with jazz music as well. The attractive part to me is the way he describes colours as characters. Here is one on Mauve, fittingly the first synthetic colour created by Pirkin.

Nordine made many more songs and poems describing colours as characters. With his infamous radio voice.

Mauve, Ken Nordine, (1:21)

*'Mauve is a character
As colourful as characters can come
But in a quite quiet way
Mauve is as quiet as a mute
Doesn't give a hoot
Should have been an owl
Wise and old
Mauve only cares about dancing
Quite quiet dancing
Makes sense
At least a kind of mauve sense
And for o so many reasons
But mostly it's the way mauve moves that makes mauve so
amazing
Such a joy to see mauve moving
Is as graceful as glide
That's true
Its known far and wide
Every move mauve makes
Marvellous sense a kind of miracle
Is mauve moving quite silent
Mauve moving quiet'*

William Perkins, photos are rare from this time, for a short while Perkins was quite known in Great Britain for discovering synthetic paint.

Magenta is in some additive colour spectrums a primary, instead of secondary, replacing red. Picture is from the web

Conclusion

Colour can be many things; disruptive, connecting, visually dazzling, grounding, beautiful, fake, artificial. Somebody might say, 'wow, what a great colour to use.' This thesis tries to put an attentive eye on the subtle differences. Explaining chromophobia, the uncanny, a view on phenomenology considering painted surfaces. That colour has a history within the subconscious and also in the ordinary.

However trivial colours might appear. Finding if people love the aesthetics and the cosmetic qualities of colour. As without colour the world would be grey and maybe dull, even without contrast and faded lines. Somewhere I find myself puzzled if the world is not colour in its entirety. Separating light and surface, depth and vision.

Colour seems to make sense and in its absence the movements of people could not be noticed, it is a big marker. Filler of our comprehension. And once in a while a person sees colour in its magnitude in nature, or art, or its arbitrary flash. passing by, reminding oneself to look.

References:

Books:

Chromophobia, David Batchelor

The Luminous and the Grey, David Batchelor

Colour, David Batchelor

Uncanny, Mike Kelley

Faux Pax, Amy Sillman

Moby Dick, Herman Melville

Poem:

Henri Michaux

Movies:

Wizard of Oz,

Song:

Mauve, Ken Nordine

Manifesto:

Theo van Doesburg

