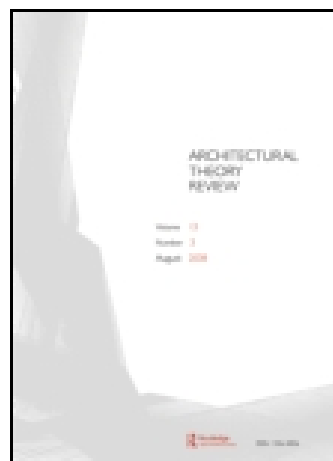


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SANDRA
KAJI-O'GRADY

FROM MONOPOLY TO JEAN NOUVEL'S SERPENTINE PAVILION: Monochromatic Buildings and Rooms

Monochromaticity has been significant in twentieth-century visual art and its aims and disciplinary effects substantially theorized. In architecture and interior design, the rendering of buildings and spaces in a single colour has, in the last decade, gone from isolated instances to a notable international phenomenon across disparate styles. Looking to monochromatic art and its specific disciplinary history, this paper attempts to understand the ambitions, context, and consequences of monochromatic architecture. Characteristic of the critical reception of monochromatic art is a tension between the cultural meanings of colour and the physiological nature of colour perception. The immersive effects of the coloured interior are physiological, yet, as this paper argues, their use is cultural and argumentative.

Numerous scholars have observed that the uses, values, and meanings ascribed to colour are subject to history and that the history of colour is inseparable from other histories—of trade, politics, technology. The superiority of the indigo from India derived from the plant, *Indigofera tinctoria*, over the blue sourced from European woad, for example, made it valuable and it became a chief article of trade in the Dutch and British East India Companies in the seventeenth century. The ways in which colours have been claimed for political purposes or specific rituals, exemplified by the fate of orange with respect to Protestantism in Britain, is also known. Nor can the epistemology of colour be divorced from the historic development of a scientific understanding of chemical pigmentation, of light waves and optics, or of the physiological perception of colour. The currency of certain colours and the deployment of colour in art and architecture are not, however, fully explained by overlapping historic circumstances or scientific advances. Colour in art and architecture serves additional ambitions and ideologies internal to each discipline. In turn, the ways in which colour is used in art and architecture can be understood as symptomatic of disciplinary preoccupations and ambitions. This becomes increasingly apparent from the mid-nineteenth century as colour itself is loosened from its dependence on natural materials. The abundance of synthetic colour means that colour choices and applications are no longer constrained by practical or economic considerations. Instead, they register the vicissitudes of fashion and shifting semiotics. As Sylvia Lavin observes, while the meanings ascribed to colours are less significant today than in the past, “its effects have become more significant than ever. And one of the effects produced by colour is the effect of today”.¹ By this, she means that colour

itself produces contemporaneity. While Lavin’s article, “What Colour is it Now?”, is triggered by her observation that architecture schools are steeped in the cathode ray blue of computer monitors, her argument suggests that it might be more useful now to attend to the way colour is culturally deployed than to trace the fate of any single colour.

This paper is concerned then with an approach to colour that has become widespread in the past two decades—the monochromatic treatment of all surfaces and objects in a room or building. Taking just one colour—let’s start with blue—numerous instances can be found: Herzog and de Meuron’s “Blue House”, Oberwil (2001); FAT’s “Blue House”, Hackney (2002); Florentijn Hofman’s “Beukelsblauw”, Rotterdam (2006); MVRDV’s rooftop extension to a private residence in Rotterdam (2006); and Carve’s “Interlace” playground in Singapore (2013). Multiple examples, across the world, by architects and designers working in diverse styles, scales, and materials can be cited for each and every colour. These recent monochromatic architectures use intense, artificial, even electric, hues and are a marked departure from the predominantly white architecture of the late modernists in the late 1960s and 1970s, such as Charles Gwathmey and Richard Meier. In that work, monochromatic applications of white were effectively *achromatic*. White was conceived as a neutral and receptive screen for environmental effects such as cloud cover, the intensity and hue of light, shadows, and dust.² Charles Blanc (aptly named) set out the idea of an opposition between colour and form in the nineteenth century: “colour is a mobile, vague, intangible element, while form on the contrary is precise, limited, palpable and constant”.³ Such ideas bloomed into fully-fledged chromophobia, as detailed by David Batchelor.⁴ Achromaticity

aimed at drawing attention to neo-Corbusian formal operations. White was also intended to affirm a modernist aesthetic or, as Wigley contends, the colourless image of modern architecture that was an effect of a historiographical tradition that suppressed the colour of the surfaces of the buildings that it describes.⁵ In selecting a colour other than white or neutral tones, it might be inferred that architects and designers declare their dissent from the modernist aesthetic, but that does not explain the choice of a monochromatic approach, rather than one in which multiple colours are employed.

In pursuing the pathology of a global outbreak of monochromatic rooms and architecture, it is worth beginning with an early instance of its appearance, which relates to themes of contagion and psychological effect. In the middle of the nineteenth century, in a short story called *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842), American author Edgar Allan Poe describes a suite of seven interconnected monochrome rooms that serve as the scene of a lavish masked ball. The walls of each room, along with ornaments, tapestries, and stained glass panes in narrow windows, are vividly and individually coloured. The most eastern room is blue, the second is purple, the third green, the fourth orange, the fifth white, and the sixth violet. The seventh apartment is shrouded in black velvet tapestries and furnished with sable carpets and an ebony clock. The ball is given by Prince Prospero for his friends on the fifth month of their voluntary seclusion to an abbey to avoid the "Red Death"—a plague whose symptoms are vague, but fatal. It is into the black room that Prince Prospero pursues a masked intruder and falls down dead when the latter turns to face him. The symbolic use of black and other colours in Poe's tale is

over-determined by Western colour conventions, but their singularity in the interior setting is striking.

The practice of thematising the finishes and furnishings of a room around a single colour has a long history, as evidenced by the Red Velvet and Blue Velvet Rooms in Chiswick House (1729), including in the East, where colour was believed to have strong effects on well-being and strongly-coloured rooms were common. But Poe's coloured rooms far exceed the tasteful thematisation at Chiswick House in their intensity and heavy-handed symbolism. The addition of coloured light through stained glass—a favourite motif of Poe's—suggests an immersive interior atmosphere, vague in its construction and materiality, but decided in its mood. In an 1840 essay titled "Philosophy of Furniture", Poe describes an ideal gentleman's room furnished in red and gold with "panes of crimson-tinted glass, set in rose-wood frames" and curtains of "an exceedingly rich crimson silk".⁶ Poe details the crimson colours of sofas, paintings, and bookshelves, and a lamp with a "crimson-tinted ground glass shade". Several of Poe's stories anticipate the detective tale, wherein a culture of surfaces is "read" by detectives. In this light, and putting aside the author's need to achieve financial success and his concomitant interest in appealing to his readers and employers, the surfaces of the idealised gentleman's room appear intended to convey, indeed extend the territory of, a character of impeccable taste and singular determination. The coloured light that pervades the room would distort the appearance of other colours in the room, including that of skin, the open page of a book, food, and drinks. Any caller that enters the room would themselves be bathed in crimson and immersed within the ambient character of the gentleman and his room. While intended as an

essay on good taste, there is, in all that gold and crimson, libidinous excess that eschews the principles of harmony and balance that already held sway in interior decoration in the period.

Influential in literature and credited with inventing the genre of detective fiction, Poe's impact on architecture and interior design is marginal despite his romantic descriptions of Gothic buildings in ruinous states. Poe had "no technical knowledge of architecture, and no interest in it as an art".⁷ He concerned himself with architecture only as a vehicle to convey sensations of melancholy and dread, hence allusions to old castles and desolate chateaux. Poe understood the powerful associations that interior design could carry and, in *The Philosophy of Composition*, notes: "close circumspection of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:—it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course must not be confounded with mere unity of place".⁸ The gentleman's room is no arbitrary frame, but an aura in which his character—voluptuous, indulgent, an aesthete, possibly vampiric—is proposed before the narrative begins.

Poe's room comes to mind when contemplating *Red Shift: I, Impregnation*, 1967–1984 by Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles. In this work, Meireles furnishes a white gallery room entirely with red objects including a red floor carpet, furniture, electric appliances, ornaments, books, plants, fish, foods, liquids, and framed red monochrome prints and paintings. Meireles has long explored the experience of bodies in space and time, not just in physical terms, but the psychological and social aspects as well. Many of his installations are intended to incite fear or disorientation as a means of heightening

the perceptual faculties of his audiences. With regard to this abiding theme in his oeuvre, Meireles appears to be using the monochromatic room much as Poe did—as a frame that positions the viewer as an intruder and, through its uncanny intensity, immediately alerts to potential danger. At one end of *Red Shift* is a dirty old sink with blood-red water gushing from a tap, a device or clue that confirms the discomfort already anticipated by the room's furnishings and which presages the imminent overflow of violence into the spatial frame.

At the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009, Meireles constructed *Pling Pling*, a series of intensely-saturated, artificially-lit, interconnected monochromatic rooms in blue, green, purple, and yellow. The doors connecting the rooms were diagonally opposed so that, as one critic described, "we swing through them with a zigzagging rhythm as if through a series of film sets, and the experience—so simple—seems to draw us into aspects of architecture, cinema and choreography all at once".⁹ The political dimension of *Pling Pling* is less easy to pinpoint than *Red Shift*. The abrupt changes of colour and the presence of digital screens communicating colour's after-effects, as well as the experience of actual after-effects, disorients and incites in the viewer a consciousness of their body in space. There is a shallow aspatiality to these rooms as well as an eerie sense of being subject to surveillance or experimentation. One recalls the architecture of control found in public lavatories lit by ultraviolet light to frustrate intravenous drug use.

Despite the political dimensions of Meireles' work, his monochrome room projects have received as much attention in interior design venues as they have in art discourse. On the mainstream lifestyle blog, *Apartment Therapy*,

Red Shift—at the time showing at the Tate Modern—is proposed as “a great jumping off point for a monochromatic space” and the reader is asked, “What about you? Would you consider a room done entirely in one shade?”¹⁰ On the same website the following year, *Pling Pling* is referred to as “the perfect source of inspiration, since it illustrates the way that colors deepen and change key in relation to one another. . . . Although these conceptual installations might be too far-out to be implemented in a living space, they demonstrate the capability of color to completely change the way a room looks and feels”.¹¹ Meireles’ political intentions are obviously debased and dismissed in mainstream design discourse, but the power of the monochrome to disorient and to engage lingers, and is thus taken up in situations where there is no political intent.

Within months of *Pling Pling*’s debut in Venice, at the 2010 Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Milan, Pierre Lissoni swathed three rooms in vibrant monochrome—yellow, pink, and blue—for the furniture manufacturer, Porro. Displayed within the rooms were examples of the company’s furniture in matching colours. New York’s Children’s Museum of the Arts by Work Architecture Company, completed in 2011, is similarly organised around a series of bright monochromatic rooms in primary and hot pastel hues. Schindler Seko Architects applied Meireles’ approach to the circulation spaces at the K Botici Students Home in Prague in 2013—monochromatic windowless spaces in lime, yellow, orange, red, purple, aqua, blue, lime green, and purple organised vertically like a rainbow.¹²

While it is disconcerting to see Meireles’ provocative installation circulating in the blogosphere as an inspiration for interior décor and Poe’s rainbow suite realised as a

promotional background for furniture, the ways in which art and literature are appropriated (albeit drained of their gushing life-blood) by design and popular culture are suggestive. The traffic is in both directions—“Red Shift” subversively mimics practices of interior decorating—but it seems that architecture and interior design gain more from their associations with art practice than the other way around. The monochromatic rooms found in contemporary galleries are sometimes indistinguishable from those found in buildings—but their differing contexts impose dissimilar audience expectations and give way to nuanced readings. This is apparent in An Te Liu’s monochromatic art work, *Title Deed*, which employs found architecture. Liu painted every exterior surface of a disused house on Leona Drive in Willowdale, Ontario, in green in 2009. The windows of the house were boarded and the guttering removed before applying latex block filler paint so that the house resembled a large piece of the property board game, Monopoly. *Title Deed* stood as a monument to the global financial crisis that had led to the original house being abandoned and made redundant. No audience could mistake it as a decorative scheme. In the same year, Monopoly used the monochrome device for the print-ad campaign, “Own It All”. Conceived by Petra Sievers of the advertising agency, JWT Frankfurt, for Parker Brothers, it involved painting four actual properties in the exact red or green of the little plastic hotels and houses one competes for in the game. Importantly, in these examples, the addition of an all-over layer of paint is the only material change to an existing environment, yet the perceptual and conceptual conditions are utterly shifted by the application of a uniform green or red, at the same time as that effort and its effects gain legibility through the contradictory frames of advertising and activism.

Many of the changes to the game since its first production by Parker Brothers in 1935 have been in the colour of the properties and notes. (The cheapest real estate in both the UK and US versions has changed from purple to brown, for example, and the US editions after 2008 feature purple \$50 notes instead of blue, while the \$10 notes are blue rather than their former yellow.) There have been exceptions to the colour of the houses and hotels: for example, in *Monopoly Here and Now* (2006), they are blue and silver; but the traditional red and green have been sufficiently consistent and resilient to become iconic. Indeed, according to Hasbro, the toy company that now owns the Monopoly brand, more than six billion little green houses and 2.25 billion red hotels had been “constructed” by 2013. If the houses were originally green to evoke the lawns of suburbia, it is now the case that the greens of suburbia bring to mind the Monopoly house. It is also the case that one cannot confront a monochromatic red building without sensing its Monopoly hotel precedent. Thus, Jean Nouvel’s red temporary pavilion for the 2010 Serpentine Gallery in London straddles the disciplines of art and architecture, yet, at the same time, is inextricably caught up in semiotic chains of publicity and branding. Other monochromatic follies in reds include Herzog and de Meuron’s pink-dyed concrete *Reading Room* at Jinhua Architecture Park (2002–2006), and we should also not forget Bernard Tschumi’s precocious red follies at Parc de la Villette from 20 years earlier. What can be observed is the historic convergence of the monochrome room in art and architecture from multiple paths of experimentation, but also the establishment of the monochromatic building as a denotative marker in systems of consumption. The coloured interior is surpassed as a frame or projection of the subject who dwells therein by monochromatic architecture as an act of

reconstructing the subject as a consumer of experiences, events, and products. The history of the monochrome in art is instructive if we are to understand this shift.

The journey that leads to the monochrome room or installation in the visual arts is more travelled than in architecture where—beyond the discussion of whiteness in modernism—the phenomenon has gone unnoticed. As other authors in this issue will have noted, architectural theorists and historians have largely been blind to colour. In contrast, monochromaticity has been so central to twentieth-century art that Barbara Rose was faced with an abundance of examples when she curated the exhibition, “Monochromes, from Malevich to the Present”, in Madrid in 2005. Rose selected 78 artists and 90 works.¹³ Rose’s exhibition, as with most discussions of the phenomenon in art, bypasses the near-monochrome traditions of *grisaille* and the lesser known *brunaille* and *verdaille*, techniques of working in shades of grey, brown, and olive green that, paradoxically, aimed to draw attention away from the presence of colour to give the effect of a classical sculptural relief.

Rose’s exhibition begins in 1918 when Kazimir Malevich executed *Suprematist Composition: White on White*. Aleksandr Rodchenko followed in 1921 with three monochrome paintings in primary colours exhibited in 5x5 + 25 in Moscow. Monochrome painting was seen by these and subsequent artists, as well as many critics, to signal the end of painting. Malevich referred to his black square as “the zero form”, Rodchenko declared his work “the end of painting” and, in the 1950s, Rauschenberg believed his White Paintings, purged as they are of any marks, colours, or images that might imply illusionistic depth, “take you to a place in painting art has not been”.¹⁴ Rauschenberg’s

contemporary, Ad Reinhardt, claimed to be making the last paintings anyone could make.¹⁵

Art critics and theorists of the modernist period, such as Clive Bell, Herbert Read, and Clement Greenberg, noted the existence of monochrome painting, but struggled to account for its appearance or value within their own, primarily formalist, theories. Greenberg, renowned for his advocacy of abstract expressionism, believed monochrome painting to be a purely conceptual practice akin to Dada, rather than a visual form of art. He dismissed Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* as having crossed the line between a determinate negation and the Dadaist realm of the gratuitous negative gesture. "I remember", he later confesses, "that my first reaction to almost monochromatic pictures shown by Rollin Crampton in 1951 at the Peridot Gallery was derision mixed with exasperation".¹⁶ Michael Fried, in many ways Greenberg's successor, was for most of his career of the view that monochromes were of no interest and, sadly, both Greenberg and Fried were exposed to a great many artists who made monochromatic art from the 1950s on—Robert Ryman, Brice Marden, and Lucio Fontana, among others. Not until the late 1990s did Fried find a situation wherein "[u]ntil now I have never been attracted to the monochrome, which inevitably struck me, in the many instances of it that I have come across over the years, as artistically inert, or to use the language of Art and Objecthood, as merely depressingly literal".¹⁷ These skirmishes over painting's relevance, and over the significance of monochrome painting, contributed to the rise of post-gallery practices that inform architecturally-scaled installations such as *Red Shift*.

While the monochromatic work of art was understood by critics as a pure realisation of

the expulsion of subjectivity, pictorial representation, and cultural specificity, which is at the heart of abstraction, artists, on the other hand, referred to a broader range of ambitions, from the minimalist idea of emphasising context over content to notions about spiritual or emotional communication.¹⁸ Yves Klein, for example, connected specific colours to individual human feelings and sensations, arguing that "blue embodies the spiritual, pink life and gold the absolute".¹⁹ Klein believed that because a single colour intensified the visual experience, it could bridge the immanent and the transcendental, and hence that "monochromes are the last vestige of physical art prior to its transfer to the immaterial".²⁰ In 1956, Klein showed monochromes in orange, yellow, red, pink, and blue before, realising that audiences mistook the work for a kind of abstract decoration, he settled for "International Klein Blue" or IKB as his signature colour. There is immediately a dissonance between Klein's avowed interest in the spiritual effects of blue and his assumption of IKB as a kind of personal brand in the art market. His next exhibition, "Proposition Monochrome; Blue Epoch", at the Gallery Apollinaire, Milan, in January 1957, featured 11 identical blue canvases, using ultramarine pigment suspended in a synthetic resin called "Rhodopas". Klein thought the blue monochrome was a visual analogue of the void, a "depth of nothingness", and began to explore single colour artworks beyond the confines of the canvas, including rooms—alongside his experiments in "Air Architecture" using gas and light. Klein was beaten to the coloured room by artist Lucio Fontana, who created the first of his "Ambiente Spaziali" in 1947—a room painted black. Subsequently, James Turrell, Dan Flavin, Yumi Kori, Anish Kapoor, Cildo Meireles, and Olafur Eliasson have each carried out monochromatic installations and environments.

Superficially, we might consider the monochromatic rooms imagined by Poe or constructed by Klein or Meireles as sharing a desire to intensify or induce emotional states through the physiological effects and psychological associations of colour. There is more going on, however, in these examples than an interest in, say, what audiences feel or think in response to the colour yellow, red, or green. This is not to say that the colours chosen are arbitrary, as Klein made clear. There are numerous examples in architecture and design where the chosen colour is intended to convey specific associations. Hawath Tompkins' "The Shed", a temporary venue for the National Theatre on London's South Bank that opened in 2013, is a striking signal red that, the architects propose, is inspired by Scandinavian barns. The bright red of the monochrome room in Attila Kovac's 2006 design for the Communist Museum in Southern Hungary was chosen because red was first used by the Jacobin club during the French Revolution and later adopted by communism.²¹ In Jamie Babbit's film, *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999), the interiors of the institution responsible for reprogramming homosexual teenagers feature highly-stylised candy pink and blue monochromatic interiors (with matching outfits for the boys and girls). There is nothing novel about using red to signal political adherence or pink for the feminine, it is the sustained and saturated application of the chosen colour that distinguishes the examples here. The wilful elimination of all other colours from view establishes artificiality and conceptual significance. This is best demonstrated by Olafur Eliasson's homochromatic experiments with single frequency lights in rooms, such as *Room for One Color* (1997).

Eliasson's *Your Uncertainty of Colour Matching Experiment* (2006), *The Weather Project* (2003),

and *Your Black Horizon* (2005) with David Adjaye are physiologically extreme versions of the monochromatic room. In *Room for One Colour*, monofrequency lights eliminate every wavelength but yellow. Within 40 seconds of entering, the white wall of a room beyond appears to be suffused with indigo blue, this an "after-image", an involuntary neurological response provoked by the optical conditions. If colour is always understood relatively and, unlike form and shape, cannot be verified by touch or sound, then the monochromatic room can be an exercise in confusion, even more so if the vibrations of light are reduced to a single wavelength. Extreme disorientation of visual perception follows and fellow audience members appear in shades between yellow and black. The air itself seems saturated with yellow light.

Technically impressive, Eliasson's works appear utterly unburdened by myth and meaning, their virtue lying solely in the entertaining experience of the limits of perception itself. Yet, for Eliasson, light and colour are not incidental or ornamental, they are a medium of dialogue between the viewer and the viewer's environments. Colour, he writes, "doesn't exist in itself but only when looked at".²² For Eliasson, "the analysis of colours is, in fact, about the ability to analyze ourselves".²³ In his single-colour rooms, one experiences a heightened sense of self, of one's activity in viewing, and of the presence of other viewers. In an interview, Eliasson explains: "The graduation of tones is easier for your eyes to detect. The brain has to understand less information than with a whole-colour picture, so we have the sense that we see much more. The yellow room is for me like hyper-seeing, a space where the vision is advanced". Since the brain has less information to deal with, the effect is to raise questions in the audience about "what and why we are looking".²⁴ When his interviewer counters,

"But you don't put anything in the room to look at", Eliasson replies:

No, that's not true. You are in there. You can look at your hands, for example. Also if somebody else walks in you not only look at them, but you realise very quickly that they are looking at you. In a normal space we don't think about who is looking at what and why we are looking, so it raises these questions.²⁵

Eliasson's investigations are cognisant of that approach to colour studies emanating from the behavioural sciences. In that discipline, research into colour is primarily concerned with empirically gauging and predicting patterns of response to colour as perceptual stimuli in the environment. However, Eliasson's monochromatic series of works are clearly situated in his larger oeuvre and questions of viewing communities and situations.

The perceptual shift entailed by single frequency light in Eliasson's experimental installations is more immediate than most architectural examples wherein monochromatic colour is achieved through the surface application of pigments. Given the longer periods of occupation, however, the impact can have equal intensity. While the conceptual objective varies, as evident in the *Monopoly* examples, the optical and experiential effect of a single saturated colour is to unify and conceal texture and pattern, to subsume detail and objects. The dimensions of the space or object become difficult to comprehend. Indeed, it is worth returning to Klein's conviction that blue, unlike other colours, "has no dimensions, it is beyond dimensions...".²⁶ But it isn't so much the presence of blue as the absence of compositional space in monochrome paintings and rooms that achieves what Donald Judd calls

the "unspatial".²⁷ Nuit Banai writes that what Klein imagined was a state of existence in which sensibility replaces object-relations.²⁸ His quest was not without tension, for the problem of the division into support and surface in painting continued to trouble him until he eventually abandoned both in the exhibition, "The Void" (1958)—a white-painted gallery space devoid of any traditional art objects. In "The Void", the monochrome is transferred from support and object into the framing gallery space. Klein's monochromes after "The Void" return to blue, but now fully embrace architectural space as billboard-sized blue panels in expansive architectural settings. Whatever colour is used, the monochromatic room upsets the relationship between viewing subject and object.

Bringing together objects of the same colour transforms them from discrete elements to a single scene. This shift from object to image is evident in Helga Steppan's compelling series of 12 photographs of her personal belongings sorted by colour, suggestively titled *See Through*. Steppan does not apply a unifying colour, but works with existing everyday coloured objects. Her photographs demonstrate that where furnishings and finishes are chosen for their conformity to the overriding conceptual chromatic schema, individual status and origin are erased—they are, indeed, *seen through*. Each element is one of a set, a fragment, subservient to, and constitutive of the whole. Hans Op de Beeck makes monochromatic interior installations that similarly establish an uncanny scenography, although his process includes the application of a coloured layer. *Christmas* (2007) is a large-scale model (2.7 × 2.4 × 1.6 m) of an imaginary living room finished in gleaming black lacquer. *Estension 2* (2007) is a monochrome matte black interpretation of a life-sized office with an abundance of

technological equipment and cabling. The careful reproduction of everyday objects, their ordinariness, and exactitude, stands in stark contrast with the artificiality of the monochromatic scene. A tension is set up between command over colour and ownership of objects.

While both Steppan and Op de Beeck operate in the context of the gallery and employ installation, sculpture, and photography, their work demonstrates the empowering potential of monochromaticity for architects in a context in which their role has been reduced to the selection, acquisition, and arrangement of designed objects as an expression of "taste" and social standing. The monochromatic room absorbs its objects such that their brand, provenance, or price is rendered irrelevant and illegible. John Nixon's argument for the monochrome painting is that it "allows a kind of free space in an otherwise over-polluted world".²⁹ In unifying the cacophony of objects into a single colour, one can achieve a powerful singularity of focus and experience.

This ambition drives the red central reception room of the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo by English architect David Adjaye (2006) and the three student rooms at Krabbesholm College by Nervous in the Service (2006). At the Peace Center, the vivid and glossy red surface treatment extends to floor, ceiling, walls, bookshelves, reception counter, and all other furniture items. The three student rooms at Krabbesholm are each in one colour—red, yellow, and grey—using subtly different tones for all surfaces as well as built-in and loose furniture, bed linen, and accessories. In essence, these furnished monochrome rooms are not that dissimilar to an empty room, for their objects and dimensions are subordinated to a

single unvaried effect. As Rem Koolhaas observes, colour can be applied so that it "alters the state of the painted wall or object, [or] would interfere with the status of the painted object". He continues:

It is only logical that, with the incredible sensorial onslaught that bombards us every day and the artificial intensities that we encounter in the virtual world, the nature of colour should change, no longer just a thin layer of change, but something that genuinely alters perception.³⁰

But we need to be cautious in assuming that the shift in perception entailed by monochromatic rooms and buildings has the same ultimate ambition.

New directions in monochrome painting serve to illustrate further possibilities. Marcia Hafif, Matthew Deleget, Joseph Marioni, and John Nixon continue to make monochrome paintings, though not, obviously, to advance it stylistically. Nor can they claim to be purging painting of historic influence, as the Russian Suprematists did, since it is impossible to view this work outside the long shadow cast by the first monochrome painters. Artists Matthew Deleget and Christopher Dean each make monochrome paintings in the maligned colour, pink, to test the boundary between Modernism and masculinity. Deleget explains, "I have been thinking a lot about monochrome painting lately, in particular how rigidly dogmatic and downright macho it can be . . . I emasculated my monochrome by painting it a bubblegum pink and then beating the crap out of it with a hammer".³¹ Artists Hugo Canoilas and Joao Ferro Martins, in their ongoing collaboration, *A Kills B*, have been exploring the idea of the monochrome with musical sound—a project not dissimilar to Yves Klein's *Symphonie*

Monoton-Silence (1961). Their performance, *Yellow Monochrome* (2008), entails the spray painting of an entire room in yellow, while a band, masked to protect against fumes, plays and the audience watch from behind glass. For Canoilas and Martins, the perfection or completion entailed in the application of a single colour is, akin to Deleget's work, to be eroded by its destruction or by the tortured process of its execution.

Eliasson and Canoilas and Martins make yellow monochromes, but if further evidence is required of the diverse interests and effects of this strategy, then we must contrast their works with the complete absence of critical ambitions in "Chameleon Cabin", a tiny paper house with a bright yellow interior that White Arkitektur made for branding agency Happy F + B (2013), or Rojind Arquitectos' yellow interiors for Nestle's laboratory building in Mexico (2009). The effect is similar, but the narrative to which it is yoked is divergent. Edgar Allan Poe's approach to composing texts comes to mind. For, as Poe declared, the usual mode of construction of a story through history or an incident is a radical error: "I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect", he says, noting that, for himself, the tone he is looking for is sadness.³² But as Canoilas and Martins have shown, the conventional "happiness" of yellow is unstable and prone to corruption. Orange is both the colour of marigolds and the defoliant Agent Orange; yellow pertains to sulphur and sunshine. The apparently minimal choice of a monochromatic room easily tips over into a maximal one of ideology and contested meaning.

Adrian Stokes once observed that "[c]olour emphasizes the outward and simultaneous otherness of space".³³ The monochrome exaggerates the potential that colour already holds for alterity, but can just as easily serve to

displace and disorient as to establish identity by its very singularity. The tagline of the Monopoly advertisement referred to earlier—"Own it All"—comes to mind. It is the convergence of "atmosphere" and "ownership" which the monochromatic room problematises and which is its major theoretical contribution to contemporary architecture. "To experience a hit of 'pure' colour, especially coloured light, is intoxicating", writes Susan Hiller, adding, "Fortunately, some artists know how to offer just the right dosage of colour to provide great pleasure without triggering the violence of total self-abandonment".³⁴ Monochrome rooms are intent on the self-abandonment of those who enter them, but to what ends requires a nuanced reading of each proposition. Self-abandonment in Eliasson's yellow rooms is aimed at the entry of the gallery visitor into a temporary collective. Self-abandonment in Nestle's laboratory building is directed at the incorporation of the self into the company, while at the Mi5 Arquitectos' orange central space in the Youth Center in Rivas-Vaciamadrid, Spain, it aims at a productive sense of belonging for adolescents. Monochromaticity brackets out the complexity of the multicoloured, image- and object-filled world of change and clamouring signification to achieve alterity. It is not so much a space of otherness that is sounded as a space of temporal dislocation. As Sylvia Lavin asserts, colour is the most implicated phenomenon and effective tool in making architecture an "agent of contemporaneity".³⁵ Monochromaticity narrows presentness to a single, sustained, ahistorical now; a mere instant in a constantly varied landscape of objects and spaces is submerged in a single image. Instead of the monochrome as a modernist icon, today's monochromes are spatial and temporal works that insert a pause. Their blankness reorients us to see what

surrounds it and to consider the act of looking. In place of a receptacle for objects, mono-

chromatic architecture emerges as a stubborn object in its own right.

Notes

1. Sylvia Lavin, "What Color is it Now?" *Perspecta*, 35, (2004), 100.
2. The white paintings of Ryman, Jo Baer, Robert Barry, Al Held, David Lee, Robert Mangold, and other artists working in the 1960s in parallel with architects such as Meier and Gwathmey came to be referred to as *achromatic*. Rauschenberg commented retrospectively, "I always thought of the white paintings as being, not passive, but very—well, hypersensitive... so that one could look at them and almost see how many people were in the room by the shadows cast, or what time of day it was"; Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 37.
3. Charles Blanc, "The Grammar of Painting and Engraving" (1867), in David Batchelor (ed.), *Colour*, London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2008, 33.
4. David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, London: Reaktion Books, 2000.
5. Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.
6. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Furniture", *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1840, 243–245, <http://www.eapoe.org/works/essays/philfurn.htm> (accessed 9 July 2014).
7. Margaret Kane, "Edgar Allan Poe and Architecture", *Sewanee Review*, 40, no. 2 (1932), 150.
8. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", *Graham's Magazine*, April 1846, cited in Kane, "Edgar Allan Poe and Architecture", 152.
9. Sebastian Smee, "A Matter of Taste: The 53rd Venice Biennale", *The Monthly* (July 2009), 54.
10. "Inspiration: Cildo Meireles' Red Room at Tate Modern", <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/inspiration-cildo-meireles-red-70979> (accessed 23 May 2014).
11. "Color Close Up: Cildo Meireles' *Pling Pling*", <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/cildo-meireles-pling-pling-col-98543> (accessed 23 May 2014).
12. http://www.archdaily.com/458329/k-botici-student-s-home-schindler-seko/52ac816fe8e44e22b90000c6_k-boti-i-student-s-home-schindler-seko_diagram-png/ (accessed 29 September 2014).
13. Barbara Rose, *Monochromes: From Malevich to the Present*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
14. Robert Rauschenberg, "Letter to Betty Parsons, 18 October 1951", in Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, Houston, TX: Menil Foundation, 1991, 230.
15. Frances Colpitt, "Systems of Opinion: Abstract Painting since 1959", in F. Colpitt (ed.), *Abstract Art in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 179.
16. Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance 1957–1969*, edited by John O'Brian, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 251.
17. Michael Fried, "Joseph Marioni, The Painter", *Artforum*, 37, no. 1 (September 1998), 149.
18. John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2000, 48.
19. Pierre Restany, *Yves Klein*, New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1982, 146.
20. Restany, *Yves Klein*, 146. This quote formed part of Klein's lecture, "The Evolution of Art towards the Immaterial", delivered at the Sorbonne on 3 June 1959.
21. Equally, there are numerous red monochromes where the colour appears arbitrary, including Odile Decq's red lacquered auditorium at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanei di Roma; the

- circulation area of one floor of OMA's Seattle Public Library (2004); Zaha Hadid's red bathrooms at the Hotel Puerta America in Spain (2005); and the vast areas of ground surface at the "red square" of the kilometre-long Superkilen Urban Park in Copenhagen by BIG architects (2012).
22. Olafur Eliasson, "Some Ideas about Colour", in Ismail Soyugenc and Richard Torchia (eds), *Olafur Eliasson: Your Colour Memory*, Glenside, PA: Arcadia University Art Gallery, 2006, 76.
 23. Eliasson, "Some Ideas about Colour", 76.
 24. Brian Cathcart, "Captain Spectacular: Olafur Eliasson", *Tate Magazine*, no. 7 (October 2003), <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/captain-spectacular> (accessed 29 September 2014).
 25. Cathcart, "Captain Spectacular".
 26. H. Osborne, *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 295.
 27. Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975*, New York: New York University Press, 1975, 182.
 28. Nuit Banai, "Monochromatic Interventions: Yves Klein and the Utopia of Spectacular Sensibility", *Colour After Klein. Rethinking Colour in Modern and Contemporary Art*, London: Barbican Centre, 2005.
 29. John Nixon, interviewed by Christopher Dean, in *Bonde, Carstensen, Donaldson and Nixon*, Sydney: Artspace, 1996, 3.
 30. Rem Koolhaas, "The Future of Colours is Looking Bright", in *Colours: Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Norman Foster, Alessandro Mendini, Blaricum*, Netherlands: V+K Publishing, 2001, unpaginated exhibition catalogue.
 31. Matthew Deleget, "Exhibition: Matthew Deleget, Daniel Levine & Tilman", Gallery Sonja Roesch, quoted in Christopher Dean, "The Pink Monochrome Project", Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of New South Wales, 2010, 80.
 32. Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", *Graham's Magazine*, 28, no. 4 (April 1846), 163–167.
 33. Adrian Stokes, "Colour and Form (1937)", in Lawrence Gowing (ed.), *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes: 1937–1958, Volume 2*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1978, 185.
 34. Susan Hiller, "On Colour" (2007), in Batchelor (ed.), *Colour*, 228.
 35. Lavin, "What Color is it Now?", 110.