

particular interest in such things! Naturally the axis of symmetry itself tends to become the most foreground place, so it is hardly surprising that classically this is the location of formal main entrances in building façades. Ultimately of course the most symmetrical possible form is the sphere. Spheres and their subsections in the form of domes again feature in many traditional forms of architecture to create attention-seeking focal points in space.

Colour

In purely physical terms colours are merely changes of the wavelength of light, and so might be thought of a continuum as in the spectrum. However, the receptors in our eyes are not continuous, and so some colours appear more dominant than others; the yellow, orange and red parts of the spectrum claim more foreground attention than the blue, green and violet parts. In fact this works out rather well in the great scheme of things, as we habitually see blue skies and green fields in the background of the natural world. The great Bauhaus student of colour, Johannes Itten, experimented with colour combinations and produced compositions of complementary colours, such as red and green, showing the proportions of each needed to command equal attention (Itten 1970).

There is a very large literature on the effects of colours on our emotions, which taken together is fairly inconclusive. However, the general wisdom seems to be that colours are either 'warm' and 'advancing', or 'cool' and 'receding'. Many describe red and yellow as 'warm' colours that tend to advance and thus seem nearer, demanding more foreground attention. By contrast, blue and green are described as 'cool' and receding colours. A space painted in red will in normal circumstances seem smaller than one painted in blue, as the walls metaphorically advance in on the occupants. Empirical work has generated results that are more equivocal on these issues than conventional design wisdom, but it does still support the general conclusions. Kwallek and Lewis, for example, found subjects working in red offices to have higher levels of stress and anxiety, whereas those working in blue offices showed higher levels of depression (Kwallek and Lewis 1990). They also found fewer errors in a clerical task performed in the red office. This suggests that the warmer colours do indeed demand more attention, raise levels of arousal and alertness, and thus enhance performance.

Number

Simple and regular repetition of an object eventually makes the object itself disappear – quite simply, eventually we do not see trees but a forest. In architectural terms, the column eventually becomes part of a colonnade. But when does this happen? We know that our short-term