Into the void:
addressing the absence of colour teaching in architecture

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Anecdotal evidence drawn from discussions with architectural design teachers across Europe has suggested a widespread deficiency in colour teaching in the contemporary architectural curriculum.

Ewen and Fiona McLachlan's recent article - 'Colour and Contingency: Theory into Practice', for the journal *Architectural Theory Review*, questions why conventional colour theory has little traction in architectural practice or in education. Architects are expected to challenge, experiment and test ideas through design. The paper suggests that a more contemporary theoretical model, which invites ambiguity and contingency and accepts the influence of individual social and cultural differences in relation to colour, may be more successful in its application than applying prescriptive rules or searching for universal laws.

Could this approach also be useful to fill the gap in colour teaching?

Firstly, the void has to be proven before considering how to fill it. The talk will draw on three current and inter-related research projects, to scope out the issues and to suggest future collaborative research.

The Colour Collection project at the University of Edinburgh, begun in October 2014, has catalogued active research and teaching of colour in art and architecture across UK institutions, demonstrating an almost universal gap in formal education. Benchmark visits and interviews with key individuals, for example Antoni Malinowski, founder of Saturated Space at the Architectural Association, have subsequently highlighted rare cases of exemplary practice. It appears however, that current UK teaching relies wholly on the passion of individual teachers rather being embedded in the formal curriculum. When the teacher retires or moves to another institution, the teaching is lost.

A new book - Colour Strategies in Architecture - written with interdisciplinary collaborators and educators at the Haus der Farbe in Zurich is the product of three years of research into selected buildings, observing, analysing and synthesising findings to establish a series of strategic examples of the role of colour as an active agent in architectural design. Rather than focusing on the specific colours, although these have been documented, the book presents another way of reading architecture through colour. The emphasis of the strategic use of colour promotes an integrated approach to colour within conventional design processes.

Thirdly, research with students at the University of Edinburgh for a text book on colour in interior design prompted the development of a series of demonstrable physical and experiential exercises. These are intended to feed into the development of a future interdisciplinary colour course.