

PALLASMAA  
THE  
EYES  
OF  
THE  
SKIN  
ARCHITECTURE  
AND THE SENSES





THE  
EYES  
OF  
THE  
SKIN



This edition first published 2012

© 2012 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

*Registered office*

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ,  
United Kingdom

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com). The right of the author to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Executive Commissioning Editor: Helen Castle

Project Editor: Miriam Swift

Assistant Editor: Calver Lezama

ISBN 978-1-119-94128-6 (hbk)

ISBN 978-1-119-94351-8 (ebk)

ISBN 978-1-119-94349-5 (ebk)

ISBN 978-1-119-94350-1 (ebk)

ISBN 978-1-119-94352-5 (ebk)

Cover design and page design by Emily Chicken

Typeset by Aptara Inc, New Delhi, India

Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International, Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

PALLASMAA  
THE  
EYES  
OF  
THE  
SKIN  
ARCHITECTURE  
AND THE SENSES



THIRD EDITION



A John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, Publication

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD	Thin Ice by Steven Holl	6
INTRODUCTION	Touching the World by Juhani Pallasmaa	10
PART ONE	Vision and Knowledge	18
	Critics of Ocularcentrism	22
	The Narcissistic and Nihilistic Eye	24
	Oral versus Visual Space	25
	Retinal Architecture and the Loss of Plasticity	28
	An Architecture of Visual Images	33
	Materiality and Time	34
	The Rejection of Alberti's Window	37
	A New Vision and Sensory Balance	40
PART TWO	The Body in the Centre	43
	Multi-Sensory Experience	44
	The Significance of the Shadow	50
	Acoustic Intimacy	53
	Silence, Time and Solitude	55
	Spaces of Scent	58
	The Shape of Touch	60
	The Taste of Stone	63
	Images of Muscle and Bone	64
	Images of Action	67
	Bodily Identification	69
	Mimesis of the Body	71
	Spaces of Memory and Imagination	72
	An Architecture of the Senses	75
	The Task of Architecture	76
A DOOR HANDLE, A HANDSHAKE	An introduction to Juhani Pallasmaa and his work by Peter MacKeith	78
NOTES		110
INDEX		123
PICTURE CREDITS		127

THIN  
ICE  
*STEVEN*  
*HOLL*



### *Foreword*

When I sat down to write these notes in rainy New York City, thinking of the fresh white snow which had just fallen in Helsinki and the early thin ice, I remembered stories of Finland's cold winter, where every year short-cut roads are improvised across the thickly frozen north lakes. Months later as the ice begins to thin, someone will take the gamble to drive across the lake and crash through. I imagine the last look out over white ice cracks spread by cold black water rising up inside the sinking car. Finland's is a tragic and mysterious beauty.

Juhani Pallasmaa and I first began to share thoughts about the phenomenology of architecture during my first visit to Finland for the 5th Alvar Aalto Symposium in Jyväskylä in August 1991.

In October 1992, we met again in Helsinki when I was there to work on the competition for the Museum of Contemporary Art. I remember a conversation about Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings as they might be interpreted or directed toward spatial sequence, texture, material and light, experienced in architecture. I recall this conversation took place over lunch below decks in a huge wooden boat anchored in the Helsinki harbour. The steam rose in curls above the vegetable soup as the boat rocked slightly in the partially frozen harbour. I have experienced the architecture of Juhani Pallasmaa, from his wonderful museum additions at Rovaniemi to his wooden summerhouse on a remarkable little stone island in the Turku Archipelago, in southwestern Finland. The way spaces feel, the sound and smell of these places, has equal weight to the way things look. Pallasmaa is not just a theoretician; he is a brilliant architect of phenomenological insight. He practises the unanalysable architecture of the senses whose phenomenal properties concretise his writings towards a philosophy of architecture.

In 1993, following an invitation from Toshio Nakamura, we worked together with Alberto Pérez-Gómez to produce the book *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*.<sup>1</sup> Several years later the publishers, A+U, chose to republish this little book, finding its arguments proved important to other architects.

Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin*, which grew out of *Questions of Perception*, is a tighter, clearer argument for the crucial phenomenological dimensions of human experience in

architecture. Not since the Danish architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen's *Experiencing Architecture* (1959) has there been such a succinct and clear text which could serve students and architects at this critical time in the development of 21st-century architecture.<sup>2</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, the book he was writing when he died, contains an astonishing chapter: 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm'. (It was, in fact, the source of the name I gave my 1992 competition entry for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki – Chiasm was changed to Kiasma, there being no 'C' in Finnish.) In the chapter's text on the 'Horizon of Things', Merleau-Ponty wrote: 'No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of "potentiality of consciousness": it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality ...'.<sup>3</sup>

In the second decade of the 21st century these thoughts go beyond the horizon and 'beneath the skin'. Throughout our world, consumer goods propelled by hyperbolic advertising techniques serve to supplant our consciousness and diffuse our reflective capacity. In architecture the application of new, digitally supercharged techniques currently join the hyperbole. With this noisy background, the work of Pallasmaa evokes reflective solitude and resolve – what he has once called 'The Architecture of Silence'. I will urge my students to read this work and reflect on 'background noise'. Today the 'depth of our being' stands on thin ice.



TOUCHING  
THE  
WORLD  
JUHANI  
*PALLASMAA*

### *Introduction to the Third Edition*

My little book *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* was first published in 1996 in the 'Polemics' series of Academy Editions, London. The editors of the series invited me to write an extended essay of 32 pages on a subject matter that I found pertinent in the architectural discourse of the time.

The second part of the manuscript took its basic ideas from an essay entitled 'An Architecture of the Seven Senses', published in the July 1994 special edition of *A+U* entitled *Questions of Perception*, a publication on Steven Holl's architectural work, which also included essays by Holl himself and Alberto Pérez-Gómez. A somewhat later lecture of mine given in a seminar on architectural phenomenology at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in June 1995, where the three writers of *Questions of Perception* presented lectures, provided the basic arguments and references for the first part of this book.

Somewhat to my surprise, the humble book was received very positively, and it became required reading in architectural theory courses in numerous schools of architecture around the world.

The polemical essay was initially based on my personal experiences, views and speculations. I had simply become increasingly concerned about the dominance of vision and the suppression of other senses in the way architecture was taught, conceived and critiqued, and the consequent disappearance of sensory and sensual qualities from architecture.

During the years since I wrote the book, interest in the significance of the senses, both philosophically and in terms of experiencing, teaching and making architecture, has grown significantly. My assumptions about the role of the body as the locus of perception, thought and consciousness, as well as about the significance of the senses in articulating, storing and processing sensory responses and thoughts, have been strengthened and confirmed by other writers. In particular, philosophical investigations on human embodiment and recent neurological research have provided support for my assumptions.

With the choice of the title 'The Eyes of the Skin', I wished to express the significance of the tactile sense for our experience and understanding of the world, but I also intended to create a