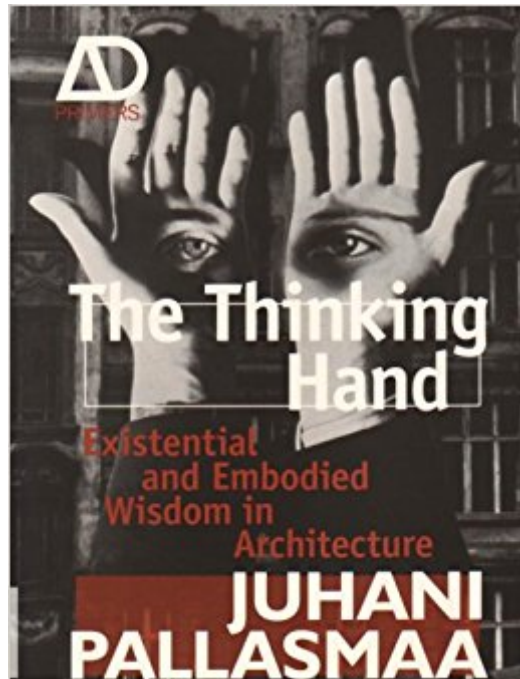




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# The Thinking Hand: Existential And Embodied Wisdom In Architecture



## Synopsis

In our current global networked culture that puts so much emphasis on the virtual and the visual, the mind and the body have become detached and ultimately disconnected. Though physical appearance is idolised for its sexual appeal and its social identity, the role of the body in developing a full understanding of the physical world and the human condition has become neglected. The potential of the human body as a knowing entity – with all our senses as well as our entire bodily functions being structured to produce and maintain silent knowledge together – fails to be recognised. It is only through the unity of mind and body that craftsmanship and artistic work can be fully realised. Even those endeavours that are generally regarded as solely intellectual, such as writing and thinking, depend on this union of mental and manual skills. In *The Thinking Hand*, Juhani Pallasmaa reveals the miraculous potential of the human hand. He shows how the pencil in the hand of the artist or architect becomes the bridge between the imagining mind and the emerging image. The book surveys the multiple essences of the hand, its biological evolution and its role in the shaping of culture, highlighting how the hand-tool union and eye-hand-mind fusion are essential for dexterity and how ultimately the body and the senses play a crucial role in memory and creative work. Pallasmaa here continues the exploration begun in his classic work *The Eyes of the Skin* by further investigating the interplay of emotion and imagination, intelligence and making, theory and life, once again redefining the task of art and architecture through well-grounded human truths.

## Book Information

Paperback: 160 pages

Publisher: Wiley; 1 edition (April 20, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0470779292

ISBN-13: 978-0470779293

Product Dimensions: 6.7 x 0.5 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #113,699 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #79 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Urban & Land Use Planning](#) #189 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Drafting & Presentation](#) #310 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Architecture](#)

## Customer Reviews

"The Thinking Hand is a superb piece of writing. A primer not just for architecture, but for life." (Blueprint, July 2009) "...beautifully illustrated sequence of essays...It is philosophical, emotional and, unusually for architectural theory, as clear as a building made of glass." (The Guardian, August 1st 2009)

Juhani Pallasmaa is one of Finland's most distinguished architects and architectural thinkers. His previous positions include: Rector of the Institute of Industrial Arts, Helsinki; Director of the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki; and Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Helsinki University of Technology. He has also held visiting professorships in several universities internationally. Pallasmaa is the author/editor of 24 books, including *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Academy, 1995 and John Wiley & Sons, 2005), *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki, 2001) and *Encounters* (Helsinki, 2005).

Required reading for my class.

A good, easy to understand book dealing with many of the modern issues and solutions we have as designers today.

love this book it's very interesting and helpful for architecture student, even a regular person will find it useful book to read.

My daughter is studying Architecture and needed this book. She rated it a 4. Its been helpful with her studies

This is the perfect book for those of you who are not only looking for a good picture. A book that will make you think about modern day dilemmas that go with being an architect and the way of thinking that has differentiated great architects like Zumthor, Holl and Ando. A must have for those interested in Phenomenology and architecture for the senses.

The first half of the book is basically dribble. The second half has some great quotes and even an original idea or two. If it's something that interests you, or if you have to read it for class (as I did) don't give up in the first half. Or just start halfway through and save yourself some time.

I was eager to read this book so I was pleased to see it on for a discounted price. The language is incredible and Pallasmaa's knowledge of architecture as a "profession" and its relationship with the surrounding world is mind-opening and intuitive. However, other than the personification of one's hands, I felt the book lacked the introduction of new ideas. A lot of the concepts discussed were "painted" with figurative language and exquisite vocabulary yet was quite obvious. As I read, I got a sense of arrogance from him--which I suppose is to be expected considering his position in life--but it turned me off a bit when trying to connect with him as an author and architect. Still may recommend, depending on case-by-case circumstances, but overall gained some things from the book.

The question of the "being of the hand", philosophically said, is a question that has begun to be considered in the twentieth century philosophy. However, already Anaxagoras had highlighted the importance of the hands as organs of the human body that have made us more intelligent than animals. But it is, above all, in Heidegger's famous work *Being and Time*, where the importance of the hands returns to the philosophical foreground, given that in this work the German philosopher introduces the hand to confront it to sight, in the sense that our immediate relation to the world does not take place through that which is available to us "before our eyes" or present-at-hand (vor-handen), but ready-to-hand (zu-handen). This way Heidegger criticizes the so called Western Metaphysics, which, since Plato, would have hampered the understanding of our relation to the world by considering objects as something which is understood inasmuch as they are essentially related to sight, Ideas or visions that we have of them, not through the senses, but through reason, understood as a vision or ideal contemplation of the prototypes of things. For Heidegger, influenced by Husserl's *Phenomenology*, a more fitting description of humans' relation to the things that surround them, understanding humans essentially as beings "being-there" (Da-sein), is not mainly a mere visual relation, but a relation through utensils (hammers, axes, etc.), whose handling requires consideration of manual abilities. For these reasons, for Heidegger, the understanding of the world is before manual than purely "mental". The world is pre-understood when we unconsciously handle ourselves in it, before than when we subsequently represent it consciously in our "mind" through images from the brain. That is why the sense of tact must precede the sense of sight in the genesis of our position in the world. The world as what is ready-to-hand must precede the world understood as what is before our eyes. The Western Philosophy, according to this, has been marked by a visual prejudice, taking the shape of what Heidegger calls a "metaphysic of presence", generated by

Platonism. However it was also held and enforced by the realist Aristotle, who interpreted Anaxagoras' well-known claim about the importance of the hands for the superiority of human's intelligence in the sense that the extraordinary manual abilities of humans could only be explained as derived from the greater capacity and size of the human brain, where principally a mind dwelled, in which ideas as copies of things came inside through sight and by a process of abstraction. However, modern Evolutionary Anthropology has corrected Aristotle in favor of Anaxagoras, given that the greater size and capacity of the human brain compared to that of our closest relatives, the simians, would be due to the appearance of an exempt and progressively more skillful hand following the consolidation of bipedalism in hominids, as the reconstructed hand of the famous Australopithecus Lucy. Frank R. Wilson's book *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture* (Pantheon, 1998) offers plenty information about the actual consideration of the study of the hand in modern biomechanical, neurological and functional Anatomy, and at the same time notes the most recent developments of Evolutionary Paleoanthropology. To all of this has joined the publication of an extraordinary book of an important and internationally recognized Finnish architect, Juhani Pallasmaa, titled: *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), in which it is analyzed the important role of the hand in handicrafts, in literary writing, and in architecture. Pallasmaa relies on the analysis of *The Hand*, of Frank Wilson -who's importance for the compilation of the materials and themes for his book is highlighted in the Acknowledgements chapter-, to write this book, in which he analyzes, quoting his own words, "the essence of the hand and its seminal role in the evolution of human skills, intelligence and conceptual capacities. As I argue - with the support of many other writers - the hand is not only a faithful, passive executer of the intentions of the brain, rather, the hand has its own intentionality, knowledge and skills. The study of the significance of the hand is expanded more generally to the significance of embodiment in human existence and creative work." (p. 21) What is new about this book about the hand, is a deepening of his critic against the dominant visual paradigm of today's most influential architecture, already analyzed in his previous work, *The eyes of the skin* (Academy Press, 2005), in the sense of correcting the mistaken belief that spatiality is something that ends in vision and can do without the tactile senses or kinesthetic, who's main focal point is constituted by the hand. For this reason the hand is the main theme of a book that, after an approach to a scientific updated understanding of what a human hand is, accompanied by quotes from artists and philosophers like Goethe, Heidegger, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, Lakoff & Johnson, among others, explores its relation to architecture and other auxiliary trades, like drawing, handicraft trades, and even computer designs, today indispensable for

architecture, although not exempt of dangers, for they tend to eliminate the manual and tactile aspects of the designed spaces, in favor of the purely visual. In this sense, Pallasmaa, professor as well as architect, proposes a deep reform of the teaching imparted in Architecture Schools so that manual knowledge's directing point of view prevails over the merely visual: "Western consumer culture continues to project a dualistic attitude towards the human body. On the one hand we have an obsessively aestheticized and eroticized cult of the body, but on the other, intelligence and creative capacity are equally celebrated as totally separate, or even individual qualities. In either case, the body and the mind are understood as unrelated entities that do not constitute an integrated unity... This division of the body and mind has, of course, its solid foundation in the history of Western philosophy. Prevailing educational pedagogies and practices also regrettably continue to separate mental, intellectual and emotional capacities from the senses and the multifarious dimensions of human embodiment. Educational practices usually provide some degree of physical training for the body, but they do not acknowledge our fundamentally embodied and holistic essence. The body is addressed in sports and dance, for instance, and the senses are directly acknowledged in connection with art and music education, but our embodied existence is rarely identified as the very basis of our interaction and integration with the world, or of our consciousness and self-understanding. Training of the hand is provided in courses that teach elementary skills in the handicrafts, but the integral role of the hand in the evolution and different manifestations of human intelligence is not acknowledged. To put it simply, today's prevailing educational principles fail to grasp the indeterminate, dynamic and sensually integrated essence of human existence, thought and action." (pp. 11-12) The key is then in not having grasped the manual essence of human existence. But Pallasmaa is not alone in this new understanding which demands the formation of a new educational and philosophical paradigm, indispensable, in his view, to "shake the foundations" (p. 22) of the erroneous paradigm actually dominant, not only in architecture, but also in philosophy. For a philosophical trend parallel to Pallasmaa's proposal of an embodied image would be the philosophy of the embodied mind advocated by Lakoff, Thompson or Dan Zahavi. For our part, though lectures imparted in the Universidad de Oviedo (Spain) and publications, we have made an effort to develop the foundations of a philosophical thought about the manual ability as the core which yields human knowledge in what we call *Pensamiento Háptico* (see Manuel F. Lorenzo, *Introducción al Pensamiento Háptico*, 2007) and as a base for a new philosophy which needs a new method, in this case inspired by the manual operativity or surgical. Juhani Pallasmaa, for his prestige and international influence as an architect, and moreover, his wide and well assimilated philosophical culture, is called to open again the doors of the Architecture Schools and Faculties,

and of Art in general, to the need to incorporate this new trend of philosophical thought related to what he names thinking hand, to try to reform the actual too computerised and technified education, and what is worst, dominated by a bad philosophy unconscious of the alienating visual architecture so in vogue. Read his important book. Manuel F. Lorenzowww.manuelflorenzo.webs.tl

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