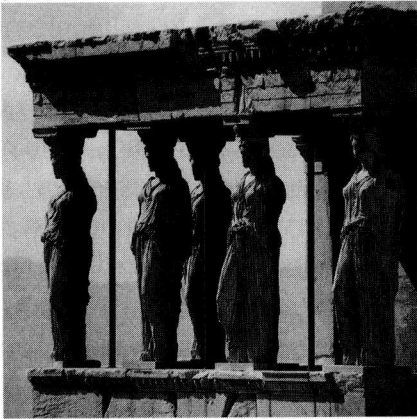
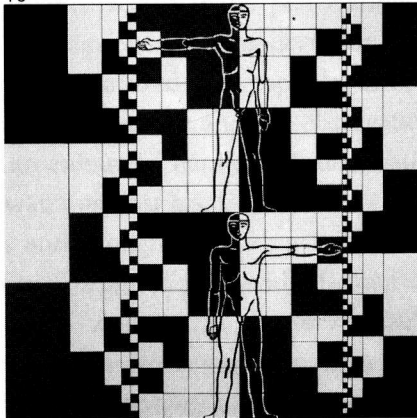


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## ARCHITECTURE AND THE HUMAN FIGURE

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We tend to interpret a building as an analogue to our body, and vice versa.

Caryatids of the Erechtheion on the Acropolis (421– 405 BC).

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Since the dynasties of ancient Egypt, measures of the human body were used in architecture. The anthropocentric tradition has been almost entirely forgotten in modern times.

Aulis Blomstedt's study of a proportional system for architecture based on the Pythagorean subdivision of a basic 180 cm measure (presumably from the early 1960s). The Aulis Blomstedt Estate/S.Blomstedt.

## PART 2

As the preceding brief survey suggests, the privileging of the sense of sight over the other senses is an inarguable theme in Western thought, and it is also an evident bias in the architecture of our century. The negative development in architecture is, of course, forcefully supported by forces and patterns of management, organisation and production as well as by the abstracting and universalising impact of technological rationality itself. The negative developments in the realm of the senses cannot, either, be directly attributed to the historical privileging of the sense of vision itself. The perception of sight as our most important sense is well grounded in physiological, perceptual and psychological facts.<sup>74</sup> The problems arise from the isolation of the eye outside its natural interaction with other sense modalities, and from the elimination and suppression of other senses, which increasingly reduce and restrict the experience of the world into the sphere of vision. This separation and reduction fragments the innate complexity, comprehensiveness and plasticity of the perceptual system, reinforcing a sense of detachment and alienation.

In this second part, I will survey the interactions of the senses and give some personal impressions of the realms of the senses in the expression and experience of architecture. In this essay I proclaim a sensory architecture in opposition to the prevailing visual understanding of the art of building.

## The Body in the Centre

I confront the city with my body; my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the facade of the cathedral, where it roams over the mouldings and contours, sensing the size of recesses and projections; my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door, and my hand grasps the door pull as I enter the dark void behind. I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy makes the human body the centre of the experiential world. He consistently argued, as Richard Kearney summarises, that '[i]t is through our bodies as living centres of intentionality ... that we choose our world and that our world chooses us'.<sup>75</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's own words, 'Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system';<sup>76</sup> and '[s]ensory experience is unstable and alien to natural perception, which we achieve with our whole body all at once, and which opens on a world of interacting senses'.<sup>77</sup>

Sensory experiences become integrated through the body, or rather, in the very constitution of the body and the human mode of being. Psychoanalytic theory has introduced the notion of body image or body schema as the centre of integration. Our bodies and movements are in constant interaction with the environment; the world and the self inform and redefine each other constantly. The percept of the body and the image of the world turn into one single continuous existential experience; there is no body separate from its domicile in space, and there is no space unrelated to the unconscious image of the perceiving self.

'The body image ... is informed fundamentally from haptic and orienting experiences early in life. Our visual images are developed later on, and depend for their meaning on primal experiences that were acquired haptically,' Kent C Bloomer and Charles W Moore argue in their book

Body, Memory, and Architecture, one of the first studies to survey the role of the body and of the senses in architectural experience.<sup>78</sup> They go on to explain: 'What is missing from our dwellings today are the potential transactions between body, imagination, and environment';<sup>79</sup> ... 'To at least some extent every place can be remembered, partly because it is unique, but partly because it has affected our bodies and generated enough associations to hold it in our personal worlds.'<sup>80</sup>

## Multi-Sensory Experience

A walk through a forest is invigorating and healing due to the constant interaction of all sense modalities; Bachelard speaks of 'the polyphony of the senses'.<sup>81</sup> The eye collaborates with the body and the other senses. One's sense of reality is strengthened and articulated by this constant interaction. Architecture is essentially an extension of nature into the man-made realm, providing the ground for perception and the horizon of experiencing and understanding the world. It is not an isolated and self-sufficient artifact; it directs our attention and existential experience to wider horizons. Architecture also gives a conceptual and material structure to societal institutions, as well as to the conditions of daily life. It concretises the cycle of the year, the course of the sun and the passing of the hours of the day.

Every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory; qualities of space, matter and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle. Architecture strengthens the existential experience, one's sense of being in the world, and this is essentially a strengthened experience of self. Instead of mere vision, or the five classical senses, architecture involves several realms of sensory experience which interact and fuse into each other.<sup>82</sup>

The psychologist James J Gibson regards the senses as aggressively seeking mechanisms rather than mere passive receivers. Instead of the five detached senses, Gibson categorises the senses in five sensory systems: visual system, auditory system, the taste-smell system, the basic-orienting

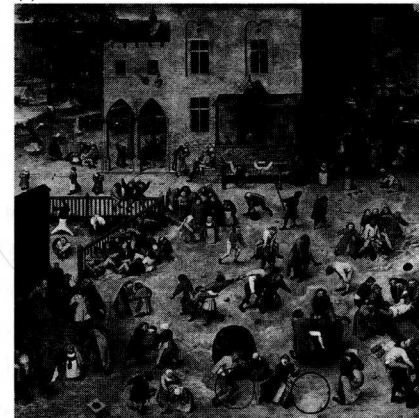
system and the haptic system.<sup>83</sup> Steinerian philosophy assumes that we actually utilise no less than 12 senses.<sup>84</sup>

The eyes want to collaborate with the other senses. All the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch – as specialisations of the skin. They define the interface between the skin and the environment – between the opaque interiority of the body and the exteriority of the world. In the view of René Spitz, ‘all perception begins in the oral cavity, which serves as the primeval bridge from inner reception to external perception’.<sup>85</sup> Even the eye touches; the gaze implies an unconscious touch, bodily mimesis and identification. As Martin Jay remarks when describing Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the senses, ‘through vision we touch the sun and the stars’.<sup>86</sup> Preceding Merleau-Ponty, the 18th-century Irish philosopher and clergyman George Berkeley related touch with vision and assumed that visual apprehension of materiality, distance and spatial depth would not be possible at all without the cooperation of the haptic memory. In Berkeley’s view, vision needs the help of touch, which provides sensations of ‘solidity, resistance, and protrusion’;<sup>87</sup> sight detached from touch could not ‘have any idea of distance, outness, or profundity, nor consequently of space or body’.<sup>88</sup> In accord with Berkeley, Hegel claimed that the only sense which can give a sensation of spatial depth is touch, because touch ‘senses the weight, resistance, and three-dimensional shape (gestalt) of material bodies, and thus makes us aware that things extend away from us in all directions’.<sup>89</sup>

Vision reveals what the touch already knows. We could think of the sense of touch as the unconscious of vision. Our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience. The distant and the near are experienced with the same intensity, and they merge into one coherent experience. In the words of Merleau-Ponty:

We see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects; Cézanne even claimed that we see their odour. If the painter is to express

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#### THE CITY OF PARTICIPATION – THE CITY OF ALIENATION

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The city of sensory engagement.

Peter Bruegel the Elder, *Children's Games*, 1560. Detail.

Kunsthistorisches Museum mit MVK und ÖTM, Vienna.

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The modern city of sensory deprivation.

The commercial section of Brasilia, Brasil, 1968.

Photo Juhani Pallasmaa.

the world, the arrangement of his colours must carry with it this indivisible whole, or else his picture will only hint at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real.<sup>90</sup>

In developing further Goethe's idea that a work of art must be 'life-enhancing',<sup>91</sup> Bernard Berenson suggested that when experiencing an artistic work, we imagine a genuine physical encounter through 'ideated sensations'. The most important of these he called 'tactile values'.<sup>92</sup> In his view, the work of authentic art stimulates our ideated sensations of touch, and this stimulation is life-enhancing. Indeed, we do feel the warmth of the water in the bathtub in Pierre Bonnard's paintings of bathing nudes and the moist air of Turner's landscapes, and we can sense the heat of the sun and the cool breeze in Matisse's paintings of windows open to a view of the sea.

In the same way, an architectural work generates an indivisible complex of impressions. The live encounter with Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater weaves the surrounding forest, the volumes, surfaces, textures and colours of the house, and even the smells of the forest and the sounds of the river, into a uniquely full experience. An architectural work is not experienced as a collection of isolated visual pictures, but in its fully embodied material and spiritual presence. A work of architecture incorporates and infuses both physical and mental structures. The visual frontality of the architectural drawing is lost in the real experience of architecture. Good architecture offers shapes and surfaces moulded for the pleasurable touch of the eye. 'Contour and profile (modénature) are the touchstone of the architect,' as Le Corbusier put it, revealing a tactile ingredient in his otherwise ocular understanding of architecture.<sup>93</sup>

Images of one sensory realm feed further imagery in another modality. Images of presence give rise to images of memory, imagination and dream. '[T]he chief benefit of the house [is that] the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace,' writes Bachelard.<sup>94</sup> But even more, an architectural space

frames, halts, strengthens and focuses our thoughts, and prevents them from getting lost. We can dream and sense our being outdoors, but we need the architectural geometry of a room to think clearly. The geometry of thought echoes the geometry of the room.

## Juhani Pallasma THE EYES OF THE SKIN Architecture and the Senses