

BOOK REVIEW

## Roger Smith, *Kinaesthesia in the Psychology, Philosophy and Culture of Human Experience*

London: Routledge, 2023. Pp. 156. ISBN 978-1-032-43590-9. £48.99 (hardback).

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This slim volume explores the awareness of embodied movement or kinaesthesia in Western culture and philosophy. The book is laden with short personal anecdotes and numerous quotations drawn from philosophy, phenomenology, psychology and the arts. Although the title broadly speaks of a culture of human experience, Smith's examples come overwhelmingly from the world of dance, which he sees as the pre-eminent form of kinaesthetic experience. In an accessible style, Smith limns a narrow scope of the book at the outset – he does not assess the perception of movement in others, nor in film, nor does he delve into kinaesthesia across cultures. His central thesis is that movement is essential to the life of the mind, a view aligned with the model of embodied cognition, which Smith believes can erase the stark line that has been etched between mind and body over centuries in Western philosophy.

The book is structured as a musical piece with four movements: the first begins with an exposition of kinaesthesia and related terms. The second is a slow one, focusing on movement and resistance in philosophy and psychology. The third movement is more active and takes on dance as an art form, as well as walking as an everyday activity. The final movement centres on the sociality of movement and assesses gestures of communication that embody agency.

Smith defines kinaesthesia as an awareness of one's body position and movement, afforded by sensory input from nerves and muscles. Proprioception is a related term but describes non-conscious sensory nerve input. 'The haptic sense' is also used to encompass touch modalities. These terms, however, have been used in conflicting ways in the literature. According to Smith, the proper domain of kinaesthesia is psychophysiology, although he is also interested in kinaesthesia's social aspects. Early in the book, Smith diverts his narrative from a definition of terms to a reflection on the impact of the COVID lockdown and the predominance of virtual meetings. He points out that it is still very much preferred to gather physically in the same location to enjoy embodied interactions.

A short historical chapter draws from Smith's 2019 expansive historical tome *The Sense of Movement: An Intellectual History*. Smith outlines the 1816 depiction of the muscular sense or sixth sense by Charles Bell and then describes the neurologist H. Charlton Bastian's first use of the term 'kinaesthesia' in 1880. In 1906, the neuroscientist C.S. Sherrington coined the term 'proprioception', often used as a synonym for 'kinaesthesia', but as Smith points out, 'kinaesthesia' captures the conscious awareness of movement.

Smith then touches upon the history of phenomenology, including the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and the contemporary philosophers Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi. These philosophers argue that the mind should not be viewed as a representational entity that produces pictures of reality, but rather as enactive: it is embodied and actively perceives the world from its unique perspective. Smith aligns kinaesthesia with embodied cognition and phenomenology, all of which centre on lived experience and action. Embodied cognition emerged in the twentieth century, according to Smith, as an attempt to counter the elitism of European views of the mind, as a way to privilege engagement in education and as a consequence of an increased focus on the body in a consumerist political economy.

In the third movement or section of the book, Smith tackles dance, even as dance emerges in every chapter as the prime example of kinaesthetic experience. Smith defines dance as 'the everyday appreciation of movement as life writ large' (p. 77). From a brief excursus into the history of modern dance, Smith quickly moves to the experiences of walking and climbing, with examples of the soulful walks of Scottish poet Nan Shepherd, the dance walk of the performer Foofwa d'imobilit , the self-reflective walks of Emile Rousseau and Leslie Stephen's Alpen hikes.

Smith's writing shifts rapidly from topic to topic, and from citation to citation. In Chapter 9, 'The dance of life', for instance, Smith introduces Nietzschean philosophy as highlighting the dancer, and contributing to the sensibility of modern dance forms. He then takes up dance therapy, various movement modalities, Howard Gardner's bodily kinaesthetic intelligence, Marcel Mauss's body techniques and finally sports psychology. The final movement of the book assesses kinaesthesia as a form of social gesture and agency – again with numerous examples from modern dance.

In his finale, Smith speaks of the limitations of the notion of an embodied mind and introduces the concept 'ensouled' as one that better captures life's worth and value. He closes out the volume with a touching depiction of his own participation in a small dance troupe, carrying out a set of movements to the music of avant-garde composer Mikhail Matushin.

This book is a departure from Smith's earlier work on the history of psychology, physiology and theories of movement, as it is a relaxed and at times personal exploration of the enactive view of mind. He clearly sees this model as best capturing the core of human experience centring on the possibilities of movement. For Smith, phenomenologists had it right over a century ago, and most psychologists missed the mark. One exception is the work of the ecological psychologist J.J. Gibson, whom Smith cites numerous times. In his final pages, Smith explains that his book is an exploration, not a scientific text, and it is best to read it in this light – as a series of poignant reflections on the vitality of movement illuminated by a wealth of historical and contemporary sources.