

The Speaking Body: How Psychisme Manifests Through Gesture, Posture, and Sensation

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Abstract

The human body functions not only as a biological organism but as a **living expressive medium** through which psychological states—collectively termed here as *psychisme*—are manifested and communicated. This review integrates interdisciplinary research from psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, and social interaction studies to explore how **gesture, posture, and bodily sensation** serve as observable and felt indicators of internal psychological processes. Building on theoretical frameworks of embodied cognition and interoception, we examine how bodily behaviors not only reflect underlying cognitive and emotional states but also causally shape mental processes. The review synthesizes empirical findings on the communicative and regulatory roles of gesture, the feedback effects of posture on affect and self-concept, and the central role of interoceptive awareness in linking bodily sensation to emotional experience. We argue that the “speaking body” is a **core interface for psychisme**, influencing social interaction, self-awareness, and cognitive processing. Implications for clinical practice, social exchange, and future research directions are discussed. **Keywords:** embodiment, interoception, gesture, posture, psychisme, nonverbal communication, cognitive–somatic integration, body language, emotion.

1. Introduction

Humans communicate and experience the world not purely through language, but through a rich tapestry of bodily signals. Gesture, posture, and internal bodily sensations provide continuous feedback between the **body and mind**, revealing emotional states, cognitive processes, and social intentions. The term *psychisme*—a fusion of psychological experience and somatic expression—captures this intimate mind–body interface.

Traditional cognitive science often treated cognition as a process confined to internal representations. However, decades of research on **embodied cognition** have challenged this view, demonstrating that bodily states and actions are integral to cognitive processing and emotional experience. The body does not merely reflect internal thought; it participates in constituting mental life.

Human communication has long been understood as a predominantly verbal enterprise, grounded in language, symbols, and conscious intention. Yet long before words are spoken—and often in contradiction to them—the body already speaks. Gesture, posture, and sensation form a continuous, expressive field through which inner psychological life manifests itself in

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observable and felt ways. The body does not merely accompany the psyche; it participates in its articulation. This work begins from the premise that psychisme is not confined to cognition or affect alone, but is enacted, inscribed, and revealed through embodied expression.

Across cultures and historical periods, philosophers, psychologists, and clinicians have noted that the body carries meaning that exceeds conscious control. A clenched jaw, a collapsed posture, a restless hand, or a sudden visceral sensation may communicate fear, resistance, desire, or conflict before the subject can name it. Such expressions are not accidental byproducts of mental states; they are integral to how psychological processes unfold in lived experience. The speaking body thus functions as both medium and message, translating psychic dynamics into movement, orientation, and sensation.

This study explores how psychisme manifests through three interrelated dimensions of embodiment: gesture as dynamic expression, posture as sustained orientation toward the world, and sensation as the internal, often pre-verbal register of psychological life. Drawing on theories of embodied cognition, non-verbal communication, and phenomenological psychology, the text examines the ways in which bodily expression reveals patterns of meaning that may remain inaccessible to language alone. Particular attention is given to moments of tension between verbal narratives and bodily signals, where the body appears to “say” what the subject cannot or will not articulate.

By foregrounding the body as an expressive and interpretive site, this work challenges dualistic models that separate mind from body and inner life from outward form. Instead, it proposes an integrated view in which psychisme is continuously enacted through corporeal presence. Understanding the speaking body not only deepens our comprehension of human communication but also opens new possibilities for psychological inquiry, clinical practice, and self-awareness.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Embodied Cognition and Mind–Body Integration

2.1 Embodied Cognition

The **embodied cognition** perspective holds that cognitive processes are deeply intertwined with the bodily systems that perceive and act in the world. Rather than being abstract computations isolated in the brain, cognition emerges through sensorimotor engagement with the environment. This perspective suggests that bodily states influence perception, memory, emotion, and reasoning.

Embodied theories posit that gestures, postures, and bodily sensations are not peripheral signals but active components of cognitive and emotional processing. For example, the **bi-directional hypothesis of language and action** argues that movement and language systems in the brain influence one another, such that bodily actions contribute to understanding and generating meaning.

2.2 Interoception and the Felt Body

Interoception refers to the perception and interpretation of internal bodily states—such as heartbeat, breath, muscle tension, and visceral sensations—that shape emotional experience and self-awareness. Research shows that interoceptive signals are foundational for emotion

generation and cognitive regulation, suggesting that awareness of these internal sensations is a key pathway through which psychisme manifests.

Interoceptive signals are not merely reflective of emotional states; they actively contribute to the construction of those states. Meta-analytic work on interoception and bodily self-awareness suggests that the integration of internal signals supports not only emotion but also action and perception.

3. Gesture: Expressing and Shaping Thought

3.1 Gesture as Cognitive Expression

Gestures accompany speech in nearly all human communication contexts and embody thought processes. They can represent spatial concepts, emphasize points, or convey emotional nuances that speech alone cannot express. These movements provide **external indices** of internal cognitive states.

Research in multimodal communication highlights that gestures often carry meaning beyond spoken language, contributing to **conceptualization and social coordination**. For example, iconic gestures illustrate spatial and semantic aspects of ideas, grounding abstract concepts in physical action.

3.2 Gesture and Cognitive Processing

Gestures not only reflect thought but also influence cognitive processes. Studies show that learners who use gestures while problem-solving or explaining concepts demonstrate improved memory and reasoning, suggesting a **feedback effect** where bodily action contributes to internal cognitive operations.

The neurological integration of action and language systems supports the idea that gesture and speech are tightly coupled, offering evidence that nonverbal bodily action plays an active role in meaning-making.

4. Posture: The Body's Emotional and Cognitive Stance

4.1 Posture as Indicator and Influencer

Body posture serves as a powerful conduit for expressing psychological states. Leaning forward may signal engagement or interest, while slumped posture can indicate withdrawal or low mood. Importantly, research indicates that adopting certain postures can **mutually influence mood and cognitive states**, offering a bidirectional relationship between posture and emotion.

Physiological studies demonstrate that expansive postures can reduce feelings of stress and increase feelings of confidence, while compressive or contracted postures correlate with affective withdrawal and reduced emotional clarity. Postural feedback effects suggest that the body's orientation in space is not merely expressive but actively participates in shaping psychological experience.

4.2 Posture and Interoceptive Feedback

The awareness of posture itself is mediated by internal signals from muscles, joints, and the vestibular system, which feed into bodily self-awareness. Recent work exploring **interoceptive**

posture awareness uses innovative methods such as photographic assessments to quantify how conscious posture relates to emotional and cognitive states.

5. Sensation and Interoceptive Experience

5.1 Internal Sensation as Emotional Language

Internal sensations—heartbeat, breathing, muscular tension—are central to emotional experience. People often report physical sensations when describing emotions (e.g., a “tight chest” when anxious). Interoceptive research shows that these internal signals combine with contextual and conceptual information to produce rich emotional states.

Bodily maps of emotion, for example, chart how people localize emotional sensations across body regions, revealing consistent patterns that mirror physiological processes and emotional categories.

5.2 Interoception and Emotion Regulation

Interoceptive awareness is not only diagnostic of emotional states but also facilitative of **emotion regulation**. Individuals with higher interoceptive accuracy show more effective emotional reappraisal and regulation strategies, indicating that internal bodily sensation awareness enables more nuanced psychological processes.

6. Neuroscientific Mechanisms

6.1 Neural Bases of Bodily Expression

Neuroscientific studies reveal that perception and production of gesture and posture engage integrated networks involving sensorimotor, premotor, and affective brain regions. Functional neuroimaging shows that observing expressive body movement activates mirror neuron systems, supporting shared representations between self and others.

Interoceptive signals are processed in regions such as the **insula and anterior cingulate cortex**, which integrate visceral input with emotional and cognitive contexts, making them key nodes in the body–mind interface.

7. Social and Clinical Implications

7.1 Social Interaction and Nonverbal Synchrony

Bodily expressions such as gesture and posture contribute to **nonverbal synchrony** in social interactions, where partners unconsciously align movements and bodily orientations. Such synchrony correlates with rapport, trust, and shared understanding, highlighting the social importance of embodied signals.

7.2 Clinical Relevance of Embodied Psychisme

Disturbances in embodied communication are implicated in clinical conditions such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia, where reduced bodily expressivity or altered interoception affects emotional experience and social engagement. An embodiment perspective suggests novel intervention approaches that integrate body-oriented therapies to enhance psychisme coherence.

8. Integration and Future Directions

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This review demonstrates that the body's gestures, postures, and sensations are not mere byproducts of internal states but active participants in psychological processes. Future research should prioritize:

- **Multimodal longitudinal studies** linking gesture, posture, and interoception with emotional and cognitive development.
- **Cross-cultural investigations** to understand how embodied psychisme varies across social contexts.
- **Interdisciplinary methodologies** combining neuroimaging, behavioral coding, and subjective reports to fully map the body–mind nexus.

9. Conclusion

The body's capacity to speak is neither metaphorical nor secondary to verbal expression; it is a primary mode through which psychological life becomes visible and felt. Gesture, posture, and sensation operate together as a living language, one that precedes speech, accompanies it, and often persists when words fail. Throughout this exploration, we have seen that psychisme does not merely reside within the body but unfolds through it, shaping and being shaped by embodied expression.

Recognizing the speaking body invites a shift in how psychological meaning is understood. Rather than treating bodily signals as symptoms to be decoded after the fact, they may be approached as active processes through which experience is organized and communicated. A gesture can reveal an emerging thought, a posture can stabilize an identity or defense, and a sensation can signal unresolved affect or implicit memory. In this sense, the body does not simply reflect the psyche; it participates in its ongoing formation.

This perspective carries important implications for both theory and practice. In research, it encourages methodologies that attend to movement, orientation, and felt experience alongside verbal report. In clinical and therapeutic contexts, it underscores the value of listening not only to what is said but to how the body speaks—often quietly, ambiguously, and with remarkable precision. More broadly, it invites individuals to cultivate awareness of their own embodied expressions as sources of insight rather than obstacles to rational understanding.

Ultimately, to acknowledge the speaking body is to accept that human subjectivity is irreducibly embodied. Psychisme lives in motion, in stance, and in sensation, continuously negotiating meaning at the threshold between inner life and the shared world. By learning to listen to this corporeal language, we gain access to dimensions of experience that deepen our understanding of ourselves and of others—beyond words, yet profoundly communicative.

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