Conceptualizing Kinesthesia as A Sense: Its Significance for Religious Experience in 12th & 13th Century Cloisters

In medieval theoretical texts, the regulation of one’s gestures and movement is frequently discussed alongside the regulation of the senses, in the context of the presentation of an ideal of perfect self-discipline and self-control, where mind and body are perfectly harmonized. In such descriptions, the material environment is often referred to, showing that this form of learning is always situated and embedded. Some medieval authors seem to acknowledged that the material environment crucially influence the individual, not only in terms of action-possibilities, but also cognitively.

The 13th century treatise known as *Speculum Novitii* offers a prime example of this: most of its sections are introduced by the reference to the physical spaces of the monastery (for example «when you go to the refectory/to chapter/to make your confession»). It also contains instructions to perform specific gestures and movements, for example: «upon arriving at the church, put the hand on the door and send away the negative thoughts by saying this.. » . In this text religious instruction becomes an immersive sensorial experience, where proprioception and kinesthetic memory play an important and hitherto little-acknowledged role.