

**Peter K. Andersson**, *Silent History: Body Language and Nonverbal Identity, 1860–1914*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen’s University Press. viii + 304pp. 98 photographs. £33/\$44.95 CAD.  
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In Lund city park on a clear spring day in 1907 two men stood talking, seemingly oblivious to the photographer’s lens trained on them. A man in a cap, hands in pockets, chest out, knee bent, in a confident and masculine pose turned to look at another in a bowler hat, eyes down, seemingly listening intently. He had his right hand placed in his jacket and in his left hand he held a cane at a determined angle. His feet were turned out. The two men looked well off, respectable and confident, and at ease surrounded by others of a similar class in the new public space of the park.

We take for granted just how much we can – and do – read from the way that people stand and use their hands, and yet we rarely treat these issues historically. Peter Andersson turns to these themes. His study explores how men and women expressed their identity and their relationship to people and environments around them through bodily comportment and gesture, and in turn examines what these almost unconscious practices can tell us about social relations in the city at a transitional moment in the history of modern urbanism. To tell this story, he ranges across urban environments in Britain, Austria and Sweden, which – for a diverse set of reasons – had differing cultures and hence different politics of the body and the street.

The book begins with an exposition of the principles of portrait photography at the end of the nineteenth century, before moving on to a series of case-studies on some of the more typical postures seen on the streets of Austria, Sweden and Britain. This includes the man with the walking stick, seen to be dapper, flamboyant and self-conscious, a ‘swell’, a ‘masher’ or a ‘grilljanne’. By the late nineteenth century, the walking stick was more of an accessory than an aid to safe conduct through the city, more often used to accompany a bent-knee pose, part of a performative stance to connote power and observation of the goings on of the modern city. Andersson also explores women’s bodily performance. He shows how women tended to be more restrained in their posture; they were often submissive in the city, with hands folded, shoulders hunched to make themselves appear smaller. While this was certainly true of middle-class women in public spaces, photography shows that women were often more unruly than this, especially when accompanied by other women, hitching up their skirts and laughing or gesticulating.

As Andersson shows, body language was constituted through a series of overlapping factors including urban space, representations in visual media and gendered norms. The performance of the body in public space was, as Andersson avers, more often an exercise in conformity and fitting in than establishing independence. People knew that a neat, upright and composed body was a sign of respectability which enabled them to participate in the anonymous modern city. However, in the context of all these similar gestures, people got very good at reading small variations, and making sense of the tyranny of minor details. Moreover, body language

was never performed in isolation, but always in dialogue with those nearby. Differences of class and gender were always embodied, and flirtation, selling and cruising were all part of the complex theatre of the street.

One of Andersson's most important interventions is the way that he uses photography in order to conduct the bulk of his analysis, using images to think about the city as a site of performance. Indeed, he is notably deft in his theorization of how and why he uses images, cutting through a swathe of theory to make the deceptively simple assertion that he wants to 'show people doing things'. In photographs of unclear faces, blurred hands gesticulating, bodies in motion, there is a tender shock in understanding the humanity of these people, now long gone from these places. In a way, it is this sense of distance and proximity that the photograph animates, which characterizes so much of what we do as urban historians.

These images of men standing legs akimbo at street corners, sellers and buyers at markets with waistcoat puffed out and thumbs in their lapels and women with hands on their hips are unmistakably and intrinsically nineteenth-century. These are not comportments that would be seen on the street today. The existence of these photographs puts us into confrontation with these facts, facts which inevitably pose new and complex questions about embodiment, urban praxis and the texture of the urban past. At points, the writing is a little longwinded, wearing academic caveats a little too heavily, and it can feel like sometimes the import and analytic drive of his argument can get lost in his effort to prove the representativeness of his case-studies. But, despite this, *Silent History* is a fascinating account. It is rare to be able to say about a book that there is not much like it, but in its geographical scope, its thoughtful commitment to visual sources and its focus on the stories embodied in the detail of the movement of hands and shoulders and hips, it provides an original and thought-provoking account of the European city at the end of the nineteenth century.

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**Carole O'Reilly**, *The Greening of the City: Urban Parks and Public Leisure, 1840–1939*. New York and London: Routledge, 2019. x + 154pp. 11 illustrations. £120.00 hbk. doi:10.1017/S0963926820000930

In *The Greening of the City*, Carole O'Reilly analyses the contested past of public parks in seven British cities: Manchester, Salford, Liverpool, Leeds, Preston, Hull and Cardiff. The book is a welcome contribution to the cultural and social history of public parks in Britain, exploring and explaining how various actors have defined their uses and how the provision of new leisure activities in particular has shaped them. O'Reilly challenges the narrative of a 'golden Victorian age' followed by a gradual decline of parks during the twentieth century by depicting constantly evolving perceptions of parks in British society. The book is at its best in exposing these often contradictory discourses.