

---

## PASSAGEWAY INTO THE IMPLICIT

---

*Nada Lou*

---

Focusing as a philosophical practice has gone through a fine, long nourishing period of being sustained inside the psychotherapy milieu. Its therapeutic values were recognized, developed, acknowledged, used, written about and esteemed.

Then, at the end of the millennium “Thinking at the Edge” (TAE) appeared at the edge of the familiar Focusing scene. At first many of us felt bewildered: “What is Gene doing to my safe focusing ‘crutch’?” was my first reaction. For a long time Focusing was THE philosophical practice through which some took a glimpse at Gendlin’s Philosophy of the Implicit. But very quickly, as I started to learn, use and explore TAE, I confirmed something I knew intuitively — the philosophy from which Focusing emerged has a lot more to offer. TAE became known as the second Philosophical practice. The touchstone for both is the *felt sense*, but the two practices connect to the felt sense for a different purpose.

This is where a fresh new journey into the Philosophy of the Implicit started for me. I came to the conclusion that this might be a way to go because experiencing is the key for gaining understanding about this field, but philosophical grounding authenticates its strength.

I must say that through the years of listening to Gene, by videotaping, editing and teaching, my initial grounding in his philosophy was more organic than academic. I consider myself exceptionally privileged to receive the gift of his wisdom and genius via this route.

In recent years as I began to take teaching of both practices, Focusing and TAE, around the world, I spontaneously put a bit of Philosophy of the Implicit Entry into the syllabus in order to distinguish between those two philosophical practices. This inclusion invited me to open out of my comfort zone and find my own Passageway into the Implicit.

Finding a passageway by simply reading the text of *A Process Model* (1997) has not been an easy way for many of us to start our study. There are easier texts from which to gaze into Gendlin’s mind, and in fact, there are numerous texts from which to study many aspects of the Philosophy of the Implicit. Gendlin’s prolific bibliography is huge. But eventually many of us reroute in the direction of slowly and carefully reading each line of *A Process Model*. I experienced a love/bafflement relationship for a long time until its concepts started to sink in! It is not that his philosophy is inventing something new. The ‘new’ is there to be grasped by crafting a philosophy that is able to contain concepts by which life forward direction is implicitly visible.

*A Process Model* is the comprehensive work in which Gendlin slowly builds up new concepts in a systematic manner, so that he can show how every living body implies the next steps of its own life process. In his amazing scheme, he envisions a new order of living process in which “focusing humans”, through felt sensing, are able to open their vistas into

new ways of relating with themselves and the life around them. A “focusing human” carries life forward in its own implied direction.

I consider myself philosophically inclined rather than officially trained. Looking back at my humble philosophical fascination of Gendlin’s philosophy, I remember, a few years ago, sharing a story with Gene about my interview with an Australian Aboriginal lady. This interview was impressive because it gave a living instance of some of Gendlin’s philosophical concepts, such as environment # 2, implying into occurring, interaction first, stoppage, and the nature of language and *the more that I can sense...but can not yet say...*

Several years ago while visiting Australia, I looked for an opportunity to find out more about Australian Aborigines. The meaning of their “Walkabouts” and word “Dadirri” was inviting me to explore. I was fortunate to videotape a long interview with an Aboriginal lady, Maisie, who was willing to pass on many stories. Out of her sharing, I gained a profound sense of understanding of “interaction first” and “implying”.

She told me this story: “As a very young child, my family decided to move to Sydney to avoid political policies of that time. We had to leave the land we belong to. Throughout my childhood my mother kept taking us back by train to the land we belong to, and taught us how to be nourished so we could learn from a deeper level what it means to be an Aboriginal. I was schooled in Sydney, but I was educated when I went with mom to the land we belong to.”

As she mentioned this phrase “the land we belong to” several more times, I asked her to explain to me what she meant by it.

“*‘Belonging and Kinship with the land’* are operational words for this experience,” she said, “but they come from the wordless reality, and any word is always painfully short to give authentic expression for non-aboriginals to understand. There is pain in it because the view is that if it cannot be expressed, it might not be that important either. This of course is not true because having a kinship with this kind of awareness, you come from a different psychology, a different position.”

“Walkabout is like pilgrimage”, she said, as she described some of their walkabouts. “My mother would take us to the land we belong to. To get us ready for the experience to learn how to ‘walk’ and how to ‘listen’, she first stopped us from talking. Listening was not with the ears; instead we observed, absorbed, moved around, noticed — and detected hidden meaning through sounds, smells, every feature of the landscape around us. Every feature of the landscape has its worth. She told us not to kick stones because they have their own worth. My father reminded us about this ‘kinship’ in droughts. He taught us to be kind to everything around us because drought is affecting everyone. I see the landscape having a story to it; it has a meaning; it has a life. This story is my story. The only way to build this relationship is to have love for it.

“Silence and stillness made an impact for the rest of my life that gave me the key to understanding where and how I belong in the scheme of things. This is the meaning of Dadirri — it comes with that inner stillness, but you have to come to that stillness to be able to receive the story. If we can take a coat off our conditioning and open up to take the feel-

ing vibes from the environment around us, we understand that we are part of the same thing. This deep knowing is the most important thing in my life.”

The point of this story is not about the educational style, but the “instance” of such an experience. She was taught how to experience herself as a part and participant of a reality that is bigger than herself, of which she is an integral part. That interaction with her environment (or any environment we belong to for that matter) already exists — it is only the recognition of this interaction that she was learning to be aware of. We don’t create it or imagine it — the situation is already there. It exists and it implies more. When she was in the bush, she felt “whole”, because she was in the environment that she belonged to (unseparated multiplicity interaffecting each other). It is not that she got lost in it and identified with it. It is the other way around — she already knew herself as a “separate”, “individual”, untangled from the whole event, but going back into the bush she was able to experience herself as more AND herself in it. It is different understanding, differently organized (Lou, 2004).

Whenever I spend time with this story, I experience more appreciation for my own understanding of the profundity of Gendlin’s Philosophy and my continuing enthusiasm to share it with others. This woman spoke out of her experience of being a part of the whole interaffecting event. With this example and several below, I want to illustrate and help reader get the *feel* for why Focusing is possible, why TAE opens a fresh approach to language and thinking, and how each person is capable of creating a First Person Science. When we Focus, we tap into this kind of implicit order. When we do TAE, we tap into it as well. Entry into the Implicit makes Focusing and TAE possible. We learn how to be in a relationship with something that is already there, but is also at the implied edge of a “not yet formed.” This is a difficult concept to buy! To have a relationship with something that does not yet exist seems absurd to our scientific minds. Yet this kind of relationship, this mode of being with something that is not clear is *just that difference that makes it work!*

Philosophical redefinition of what Gendlin means by “body” is vital to begin study of his Philosophy. Gendlin points to the fact that words don’t have fixed meaning. This applies to the word “body” as well. It also applies to a large topic about the language in his philosophy, and so I will try to put some light on this difficult concept so the use of words and source of language could be understood better in this article.

Language that is used in everyday life has established meaning. Everybody understands (and often misunderstands) what one is saying — it seems. But when one Focuses or does TAE work, what comes from the felt sensing is fresh and has new meaning. What comes — (the “IT” or “...”) does not have words yet — it is not yet articulated. New symbolization comes from the body’s implied meaning, and any ‘*public word*’ for that new meaning does not adequately represent this new(ly) forming meaning. When Gendlin uses the word “body”, he means something more complex than what this word means in public language.

So the usual meaning of the word “body” needs to be given another look.

I took Gendlin’s article “Three Assertions about the Body” to help me make my points (Gendlin, 1993). These three subtitles will lead me through my own TAE formation of this article:

- THE SITUATIONAL BODY
- WE HAVE PLANT BODIES
- THE BODY IMPLIES ITS RIGHT NEXT STEP

### THE SITUATIONAL BODY

Body knows the situation — feeling comfortable or not comfortable. You can sense what is behind you. Here are some simple examples of this.

Let's imagine — when you arrive at a Conference or a crowded party of some kind, you get a sense of the place and people. You might have an experience of running into people that you definitely knew from before, but you cannot “place” them — you can not remember their name, or where you met them before, but you have a definite sense “about” them. If you touched into that sense it would probably not be clear — but there might be something like *pleasant* or *unpleasant*; or *I'd better not get too close*; or *I really want to reconnect*. If somebody asked you how that is, you would have a *sense of it* — rather than clear information.

Let's say you open your computer and see in your Inbox an e-mail from somebody. This is not just about the e-mail you received — you know that it might contain a reply to your last e-mail, you know that the person who wrote is such and such, and you feel so and so about her, and before you even met her you heard (about her) that she is not easy to be with. Then there is your computer that is loaded with other e-mails...and the room you work in. *All of that* is a part of this moment you see her e-mail.

All of that IS your body — IS that SITUATIONAL body, and it implies complexity and intricacy. Body carries — is — an implicit intricacy of the situation. Experientially it is unseparated multiplicity. It is “THAT”.

The Australian Aboriginal's story above is an intricate instance of the Situational body. To have the experience of the “Land we belong to”, Maisie's body *implied everything* that was part of this situation. So her body — in this situation — implies, IS the rocks and kangaroos hopping around and snakes and dry land and silence and (“...”).

In Gendlin's words:

— Experience is *felt* rather than spoken or visual — it is not words or images, but a *bodily sense*.

— It does not fit the common names or categories of feelings. It is a unique sense of this person or this situation.

— Although such a body-sense comes as one feeling, we can sense that it contains intricacy.

— A situation always involves some living thing that is in the process of organizing its further living.

## WE HAVE PLANT BODIES

We live in the culture in which there is one predominant model by which we observe ourselves and the world around us. We call it the Scientific model or Unit model. There are others; we are aware of them to certain degrees — but they don't have as dominant a status as the Unit model.

We assume that what we know comes to us through our five senses. It does. It comes to us as one or another kind of information, and we collect all these little units together and sort them out to put together a piece of information or a concept. We took parts/units and made a whole of it.

You have to write your exam paper; you go on the Internet, read books, take notes, hear lectures, sort out facts and data, put them together and hand them in. This is true — this is one way that the information comes to us, is processed and passed on.

But this is not the only way that the body knows. Many human experiences are actually internally complex, wider and richer. The Unit model has no tools or words or concepts to handle such intricate experiences. Take an experience of a beautiful sunset, or holding a newborn baby, or the coffee you shared with your friend. The word body KNOWS is gaining a different meaning as we progress into this Philosophy.

Look at a beautiful flower in your garden or any living plant that you encounter. It does not have five senses, yet it knows where to find a bit of earth, enough sunshine and moisture, and the right kind of nutrition to live on this particular spot. The interacting of just that much of sun and earth and wind and temperatures and iron and other chemicals and water IS this plant. It IS its own living.

I have in front of me a beautiful photo of a flowering vine I took last year on vacation. They grow in Croatia on the Island of Korcula where Marko Polo was born. They have a name — bougainvillea — they are Mediterranean/tropical flowering shrubs. You can find out more about them on Wikipedia. This kind of information is scientific information. This plant needs sunshine, nutrients, water, other chemicals, Mediterranean/ tropical climate, and so on. In Unit model each one of these elements could be identified separately. An observer can see it, a scientist can study and classify it, and group it into kinds — very useful knowledge! We need this kind of information for our lives to run smoothly.

But bougainvilleas don't need to know all of that! They don't need to have this information. They KNOW what they are. They know how to grow where the climate and environment provide and support them to be a bougainvillea. This kind of knowing is REFLEXIVELY IDENTICAL with each organism's living process. Thus, it could be explained that the bougainvillea and its environment are one process. How is this possible? This water, those chemicals, that kind of heat, so much sunshine, such wind — all of that — contributes to making this bougainvillea the way it is. All of this is one event or one process or unseparated multiplicity. The bougainvillea is not just bougainvillea, but it implies...*more...* the wind that moves it, the water and nutrients that nourish it, the sun that makes it grow. They are *reflexively identical*.

It might be helpful to the reader to pause for a moment to do a little exercise in observation and assessment: Think about which is your favorite flower or vegetable or tree... sense inside — stand up — sense how it would be if all is well and fine. Sense the drought and wilting, and then also a sudden drenching. You might have some fun, but also hopefully, an experience of a knowing of different kind.

Here is another example that might bring more clarity to this concept. Here is an interesting fact about the gum tree. (Eucalyptus). In a very harsh climate and often unforgiving droughts, these trees know how to preserve themselves. When the droughts are prolonged and the tree is in a danger of dying, it actually trims itself by dropping a whole big branch off. It *implies its own further living* by eliminating excess, without which it cannot continue its life. Nobody told it to do that. *It knows.*

So never park your car below a gum tree!

When I said above that Maisie (the Aboriginal lady) IS her situation — she is who she is — *and* — she is also rocks and land and silence and listening — (in a certain way, because all of these participate in her living process in this particular situation). So reflexively the land — and all about it in that situation — are also Maisie. It is one unseparated event.

This kind of KNOWING is implicit in all living bodies — plants and bugs and animals and humans. Through Focusing and TAE, humans deliberately chose to get in touch with this implicit knowing (felt sense) which carries life forward in its own direction. In terms of A Process Model, a Focusing human is the beginning of next (new) order.

### **ALL LIVING THINGS ARE ALSO THIS INFORMATION**

Now bear with me as I try to convey this philosophical curl. If I succeed, you will be a lot closer to the reply about *why Focusing works!*

Animals and everything more complex than plants — including humans — have and are made of this same PLANT-like information. Just as plants make themselves out of an environment that supports them (interacting within their environment), animals also make themselves out of the food they eat, the sun they take, the oxygen they breathe. Their bodies imply their own living. They also have the five senses. What they get from five senses comes into the already existing plant kind of body. The already more complex body is further elaborated and modified. The five senses don't make the animal body, they elaborate and modify the living.

The human body — your body — is also at least this plant body. The language, behavior, consciousness are elaborations of tissue processes.

*Living is always a fresh forming. There is a kind of consciousness that has all this forming implied in it already. The tissue process, behavior, language and focusing comes from this kind of implicit consciousness (Gendlin on DVD "Some Philosophical Concepts").*

## **THE BODY IMPLIES ITS RIGHT NEXT STEP**

EVERY LIVING BODY IMPLIES THE NEXT STEPS OF ITS LIFE-PROCESS.

Have you ever experienced the “tip of the tongue” phenomenon? You are looking for the word that somehow you know will say what you want to say, but the word does not come. You have it and you don’t have it. It will not work if you try to use some other word that is “close”. You cannot will it to come. Your felt sense won’t let you do that. It comes by itself. Because “...” the body implies the next step.

The body implies its further living. One very simple example is the newborn baby and mother’s milk. Milk arrives into the mother’s breast only at the time when there is a baby to suck it. The mother does not consciously “order” milk to emerge; neither does the baby have to take a course in how to suck. So it can be said that the baby implies milk in mother’s breast — and in the same way — that milk implies a baby who will suck it.

Body implies its further living. With Focusing we tap into this *whole body implied meaning* which in turn forms *the knowing* of its further life forward direction.

Gendlin points out that Albert Einstein said he was led towards his theory of relativity by a “feeling” that guided him to stay on the track. He apparently stayed in this “KNOWING, BUT NOT KNOWING” for about 15 years. His knowledge of math and physics, of course, were important tools that facilitated him in elaborating THAT, also known as “...” a “felt sense” or “direct referent.”

## **IN THE NOT KNOWING THERE IS KNOWING**

This interesting paradox needs a creation of space in which one can pause to allow something new to come. It is truly a creative, generative space where everything is possible, but only what occurs into the *implied* will bring the “Aha, Yes!” Focusing practice is reliant on providing such space. TAE practice, thinking from the felt sense, and generating new concepts emerge in that mode.

At the Montreal International this year, I opened my presentation with a beautiful Beatles song “*Because the world is round it turns me on*”. The version I used was one of a unique recording — the Beatles singing a cappella.

Preparing for my presentation at the 2008 Montreal International is an example of such a TAE evolving process. The beautiful Beatles’ song “Because the world is round it turns me on” captivated me, and every time I listened to it, the presentation would come to my mind, along with the need to prepare it. Every time I started to write something down, I had a real body feel of voices blending harmonies from that song. I did not have the connection, but I knew there was a link. The sound and subtleties of voices interacting with each other were crossing with my ideas, creating an environment for deeper exploratory work. I started to think about each Beatle as a person, and how their lives happen to interact at a time when the music scene of the world was ready to receive them. That gave me this whole idea about how “interaction” produced Beatles. Like bougainvilleas and the nutrients and wind are one process, so the Beatles and their voices interacting with each other are one process. They imply each other.

From our unit-trained minds and perspectives, we could say that the four young men got together, called themselves the Beatles and wrote this song — and many other songs — and became popular and rich. But where did this music come from? Is it that they said, “Oh, we are just going to get together, sit down and write ‘Because the world is round it turns me on’ and get rich and popular?”

Anyone who ever produced something creatively knows that it does not work that way. You have music implied in your bones, in your sense, but to compose a song or write a poem or paint a picture — it is at this *edge* that you sense where it should go, where you want it to go — but you don’t have it yet. It is implied — and from within — it is an intricate space, much richer and more complex territory that implies — but oh so precisely — ‘just that sound’, ‘just that harmony’, ‘just those words’ would do. You try this and you try that and you make a pause — to make a space for something to come. When the shift comes the fit feels perfect. The fit feels perfect and the shift comes. And there is an AHA!

Music, which was not yet formed, was implied in each of these talented young men. Through their interacting the song was created. The implied music and talents and situation carried forward (explicated) a new song. It is the interaction of their implied music, just that particular music, and these particular lyrics, and with these particular youngsters that formed the Beatles. Beatles are the outcome — so to speak — of their implied talents and opportunities that occurred into their implying.

There is more — further implying. Nobody could have predicted the impact they made on the world of music. Somehow the Beatles were writing songs that touched the nerve of their generation — and beyond and still. Something was implied in the public arena as well, that their music *occurred into*. That is what made the “Fab Four.”

Again, I would ask the reader to take a moment to sense this. Try to remember the time when something like this was true for you. A ‘creative time’ of your own that brought a rewarding result. Remember the process?

*“Living is always a fresh forming including thinking and talking and Focusing. And this fresh forming is all the way from cells up”* (Gendlin in Lou, 2008).

In conclusion, I’d like to share some pointers about Focusing and TAE.

These two practices are similar in many ways and different in others. What is common is the philosophy which generated them and the Felt Sense as the touchstone. The two practices have a different purpose for dwelling in the Felt Sense.

Although these are artificial divisions, they might be helpful to see that these two practices are different, yet when you know both, you draw from both.

Focusing is personal. Nobody needs to know what you got in touch with, or what shifted — it is about you for yourself (but the results also affect the people around you).

TAE is social. TAE helps you to think from the felt sense. Thinking from the felt sense is always fresh, always more and always about something for which you have a knowing, but have no words to express — *yet*. There is a desire to develop that ‘it’ freshly, and to communicate *it* credibly.

Through TAE one creates “The First Person Science.” If you develop some new concepts or theories that come from your thinking out of your felt sense — they can add to, elaborate, change the existing science and social order in many ways. What you know in this way must be true because *you are living it*.

Focusing is a quest for resolution. TAE is finding the way to articulate from what you know at the edge of awareness. The First Person Science is your developed knowing capable of bringing fresh growth into old concepts.

As I am putting finishing touches on this article, an exciting felt-ness is emerging. On the other side of this Passageway, the implicit veracity is budding. Every time in our lives that we experience some kind of stoppage, there is also the faint sense that something fresh is forming. At that edge, there is a real choice — to ignore it or to explore it. I infer that the invitation is towards the latter. Focusing and TAE offer a genuine Passageway into fresh exploration. And when the AHA! occurs, I am amazed that inevitably something fresh comes that fits perfectly into something I did not know was missing.

## REFERENCES

- Gendlin, E.T. (1993). Three assertions about the body. *The Folio. Journal for Focusing and Experiential Therapy*. 12(1), 21-33.
- Gendlin, E.T. (1997). *A process model*. New York: The Focusing Institute.
- Lou, N. (2004). *Grassroots introduction to TAE manual*. Self-published.
- Lou, N. (Producer) (2008). *Some philosophical concepts: Eugene Gendlin*. [DVD]
- Lou, N. (Producer) (1998). *Exploration into aboriginal spirituality* [DVD]

---

*Nada Lou can be reached at: 450-692-9339, focusing in focus [www.nadalou.com](http://www.nadalou.com)*

