Experiencing life and belonging to nature with Focusing

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Abstract

We are currently witnessing a waste of life coupled with an extinction of experience. But in the midst of these afflicting times, have you noticed that life continues to manifest within you? Have you ever noted how your body reacts to the situations you experience? Have you ever remarked the precision with which it tells you what a situation means at any given moment? And what direction to take, integrating everything that makes you who you are and everything that is important to you as a person? Have you ever felt in your body the intensity and appropriateness of the contrast that arises when you think of a place in nature that you cherish, while evoking a place that repels you? Whether the feelings are localized or more diffuse, powerful or subtle, familiar or completely new, they tell us that our body 'knows' what's going on for us at any given moment and, if we give ourselves the means to listen, invites us to trust it and take action. This is the basic principle of Focusing, a mind-body approach to 'problem solving' based on the overall feeling produced by a particular situation, developed by philosopher and psychotherapist Eugene T. Gendlin. This approach builds on some of the foundations of ecopsychology, such as the primacy of lived experience and contact with living things in achieving health that connects inner and earthly life. In this paper, I argue that Focusing allows us to experience life and belonging to nature as a more-than-human world. As such, it is fully suited to fostering our first person understanding of the sentient, psychological, and spiritual interrelationship between us as human

beings and the other beings of the natural world. In this article, I introduce Gendlin and Focusing, a meaningful approach that celebrates life and the vitality of each individual. I discuss its properties and strengths through the prism of ecopsychological concerns.

Keywords: Experience, life, belonging to nature, Focusing, bodily felt sense.

Introduction

Concern for life is the starting point for ecopsychology, for Focusing, and for this text. In the face of the violation and waste of human and nonhuman life, many wounded scholars have sought to understand the connections between these two realms of violence: the violation we recognize as ecological crisis and the violation we recognize as human suffering (Fisher, 2012). Indeed, the earth, the 'non-human environment' such as trees, clouds, frogs, rivers, and the elemental forces of nature exert a profound influence on our human experience (Abram, 2013). Understanding these connections is one of the challenges of ecopsychology, which is an effort to remember how we humans are part of the larger process of life. Its intention is to say, 'We humans are also nature. Its vision is one of human healing and flourishing in concert with the healing and flourishing of the natural world as a whole, in a great celebration of life' (Fisher, op. cit.). This unity is at the heart of Bateson's work describing how our personal minds are part of an 'eco-mental system' shared with other living beings (1972). For example, his assertion that to pollute Lake Erie is to drive it mad is a way of identifying suffering in the soul of the natural world. For Roszak, who created the notion of ecopsychology, the 'ecological unconscious' is inspired by Jung's 'collective unconscious', whose content is not derived from personal experience but is universal to

humanity (1992). For him, this unconscious harbours the compact ecological intelligence of our species, which we repress, leaving our 'inherent sense of environment and life' fallow. Ecopsychology approaches psyche in relation to its earthly or natural home (*oikos,* the ancient Greek 'house') and explores 'the fundamental shifts in our patterns of identity and relationship that occur when we include our connection to the web of life around us as essential to human well-being'. Today, this well-being is often under threat throughout the world, despite calls to make it a priority from many Indigenous peoples (Van Ingen, 2020; Taylor, 2023), for whom balancing and maintaining reciprocal relationships with the natural world, populated by other-than-human beings, is central to wellness and health. To imagine reciprocal relationships with them is to imagine an otherness that we can encounter and that can, in return, encounter us. These other-than-humans include all entities whose existence is established by humans on a relational level (Souriau, Stengers, and Latour, 2009): animals, plants, minerals, elementals, and so on. The terminology of 'other-than-human' is an extension of the term proposed by (Hallowell, 1960) and invites us to go beyond the opposition induced by the term 'non-human'. In any case, it's our experience of other-than-humans that enables us to respond to their calls and demands. So, if we want to make ourselves available to their demands, it is essential to place our lived experience - accessing it, describing it, studying it - at the centre of our approach. This is precisely what Eugene T. Gendlin's Focusing method, described below, does.

Introducing Gendlin and Focusing

Eugene T. Gendlin (1926-2017) was an American philosopher and psychotherapist. He studied at the University of Chicago with Carl Rogers, the founder of the person-centered approach, and defended his PhD in philosophy in 1958. They subsequently worked closely together, and Gendlin's theories had a profound

influence on Rogers' personal beliefs. They played a crucial role in the development of Rogers' perspective on psychotherapy, particularly the importance of the person's access to his or her own lived experience. In the 1950s and 1960s, under Rogers' supervision, Gendlin conducted research and developed his own approach based on the idea that the process of change in psychotherapy is related to the way in which people access - and then process - their lived experience. Together, Gendlin and Rogers identified, from the transcripts of numerous clinical interviews, a particular way of accessing, listening to, and understanding the bodily feelings that accompany the thoughts and emotions aroused by the problems that brought them to therapy. Gendlin then developed a way to assess this particular disposition, which they found correlated with a person's tendency to access a deeper level of self-understanding and seemed to facilitate the processes of problem solving, personal transformation, and lasting positive change in psychotherapy. As a result, Gendlin developed a method for coaching people on how to connect with their feelings in order to improve their outcomes in therapy. The Focusing method was born, and further work showed that it could be used outside of therapy for all kinds of problem situations.

In addition to his commitment to psychotherapy and co-creative therapy, Gendlin contributed to spirituality and phenomenological philosophy in an interlocking manner (1962/1997). Indeed, phenomenology seeks to overcome the separation between a world outside the subject on the one hand and the subject's inner life on the other. It is based on the study of lived experience, as the ongoing encounter between the individual and the world in which he or she lives. This philosophy shows that lived experience, especially in its embodied dimension, reveals the importance of feelings as a mode of knowledge. We could say that Gendlin contributed to the development of a concrete and operative phenomenology with Focusing, strengthening people's connection

with their inner experience. As Gendlin notes (ibid.: 15-16) 'Nothing is as debilitating as a confused and distant functioning of experiencing. It is the chief malaise of our society', echoing Pyle's work on the extinction of experience and the loss of contact with other-than-human calls (Pyle, 1993). This is also the view of Fisher (op. cit.: 36), who writes that 'humans feel isolated in the cosmos because they are no longer connected to nature and have lost their emotional 'unconscious identity' with natural phenomena. These have gradually lost their symbolic meaning. No voice speaks to man (...) Nor does he speak to them in the belief that they can hear him. His contact with nature has disappeared, and with it the deep emotional energy that this symbolic connection provided'.

Gendlin has chosen the word 'Focusing' as a metaphor for adjusting binoculars from a blurry image to clear, recognizable objects. For him, it's a process that involves: i. recognizing initially vague bodily feelings that gradually become noticeable, ii. bringing them into focus, iii. welcoming them, and iv. questioning them. The main idea behind Focusing is that our bodies know more about the situations we are experiencing than we are explicitly aware of. It's an invitation to stop, open up, and focus on the whole of what's happening to us here and now, and especially on our internal bodily feelings (cf i.), which we often ignore. As we focus, we ask ourselves, 'How is my whole being experiencing this situation?' This question allows us to pay attention to something that is being experienced but not (yet) expressed in words. This overall, initially vague feeling is the basis of the Focusing process, leading to the identification of the 'bodily felt sense' on which the whole process is based. Bodily felt sense is more than a physical sensation, an emotion, thoughts, a feeling and so on. It's all of these at once, everything our body is experiencing about the situation and the meaning that is emerging for us. The experiential anchoring of meaning is at the heart of the Focusing process, including its pre-reflective dimension. Indeed, meanings are developing for us even

prior to our conscious awareness of them. As Johnson recalls (2007: 26): 'Without this experiential rootedness, meanings would be miracles born *ex nihilo* as disembodied cogitations'.

The Focusing process can be practiced from a second person perspective (when accompanied by another person) or from a first-person perspective (self-Focusing). In both cases, what is being expressed is 'first person' because it is a description of a singular subjective lived experience. The fact that we are questioning our entire being with Focusing is a really important point. As the International Institute website says, 'When we don't know how to listen to our senses, we often ask ourselves: Should I follow my heart or my head? My gut or my logical mind? The value of Focusing is that we learn to open up to the full range of our body's experiences. In Focusing, we don't choose between conflicting parts of ourselves; rather, we ask what it's like to experience it all' (https://focusing.org/).

Principles of Focusing, a sense-making approach celebrating life

Below are the main principles of Focusing, a method of dynamically constructing meaning from the body, feelings, and contact with life as it unfolds through lived experience.

The body is the situation: Experiencing and the relational dimension of Focusing

Gendlin (op. cit.) proposed the term 'experiencing' to express what we feel as we live through an experience; it's a kind of 'translation' of the experience into feelings. For example, good news at a neighborhood meeting about an issue we've been worried about changes our body and we feel relieved. According to Gendlin, experience is neither 'in' nor 'out' of the body. All human activity is simultaneously embodied (in a body) and situated (in the environment). A very simple and powerful example given by Gendlin is the following: Breathing is air

and is our lungs. If there's no air, breathing stops and the structure of the body eventually disintegrates. This way of looking at the situation leads to an understanding of the body and the environment as not separate. For Gendlin, such a separation is actually an abstraction, because biologically it doesn't make sense - it's artificial. Thus, living an experience is always fundamentally relational. For its part, ecopsychology reveals the relationality and radical interdependence of the multiple organisms that populate and constitute the terrestrial world, including, of course, the human organism. Recognizing and better understanding the relationship between humans and nature as a relationship is what drives the 'psychological task' of ecopsychology, according to Fisher (op. cit.).

Body and healing in Gendlin's view

For Gendlin, body is a complex vital system that is constantly striving for well-being. When we feel discomfort, it's an indication that our body knows where its well-being lies and is moving toward that goal. It has a sense of balance, and discomfort allows us to sense what would be best for us based on the distance between that state and complete rest. Gendlin (2006: 83-84) writes: 'When I speak of the 'body', I mean more than just the physical mechanism. Physically, you feel what's going on not only around you, but also in your head. Your body is part of a vast system that encompasses more than where and when you are, and more than just yourself: it encompasses the entire perceptible universe'. When something goes wrong in our body, it knows and acts immediately to restore well-being and balance. Knowing its state of equilibrium, it constantly monitors its mechanisms and adjusts them to come as close to it as possible. This is the case, for example, with maintaining body temperature: we don't have to consciously control this process; we trust our body to do it successfully. If our temperature deviates too far from 37° Celsius, our body knows it and we feel uncomfortable. Our bodies heal themselves - medicine merely supports the healing process - and we can sense

whether or not our actions support our healing. With Focusing, we can listen to our body's instinct for survival and healing and use it to guide us through situations.

An event implies its own change - 'Carrying Forward' and the implicit stages of life

Living involves taking one's next steps in an orderly, implicit sequence. This is what Gendlin calls 'carrying forward', another pillar of Focusing that is very close to Rogers' (1980) 'actualizing tendency'. There is a slight nuance between Gendlin's 'carrying forward' and Rogers' actualizing tendency, which focuses more on the dynamics of the living, while Gendlin emphasizes the process itself, which is self-generating. Most of the time, when a person is listening to their bodily sense, the two will 'overlap', but the gaze is not focused in the same place by these two notions.

'Carrying forward' could be defined as the forces or impulses of life. Gendlin uses the example of digestion, where eating leads to the presence of saliva in the mouth, followed by the presence of juice in the stomach, which in turn leads to the absorption of nutrients into the bloodstream and the elimination of toxins. If one of these events fails to occur (e.g., food runs out), this very delicate sequence is disrupted. The idea of Focusing is that our felt experiences imply their own next steps in our interactions. In the person-centered approach, Rogers observed that when the therapist expresses empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, clients seem to naturally evolve toward a fuller life he called 'self-actualizing tendency'. This is another example of the actualizing tendency.

Experiencing is felt through the bodily sense - 'felt sense' and 'felt shift'

We can access experiencing - that is, what we feel when we're having an experience - through what Gendlin has called the 'felt sense' or

'bodily felt sense'. When we allow our bodily sense of a situation to come to us, our feeling is at first fuzzy, whole, all-encompassing, and yet we feel it very clearly. It's not always easy to tell the difference between our felt sense and other feelings, such as emotions. Contrast seems to be the key to identifying what a felt sense is. For example, we can start with our felt sense of a place in nature that we like, let it come to us and then describe it, and then contact our felt sense of another place that we don't like. The contrast is striking and tells us something about the nature of felt sense: at once vague, fuzzy, and at the same time clear, singular, and highly significant. This vague but very concrete bodily feeling is a weave of past histories and present meanings, made up of central and more peripheral elements. In this feeling, everything counts implicitly, and this whole carries the felt meaning of the situation. It is complex in the etymological sense of the word complexus ('woven') and refers to the body as it experiences the situation in the present moment.

This primacy given to the present moment echoes Stern's work (2004) and his theory of the present moment, which reveals 'the world in a grain of sand', to use Blake's poetic phrase, and translates both the size of the small world revealed by microanalysis and the larger panorama of the person's past and present life often discovered in the small world of the present moment in psychotherapy. The invitation of Focusing is to stay with the felt sense as it unfolds, to look at it with curiosity and without judgment. This suspension of judgment is reminiscent of *epochè*, at the core of phenomenology. Phenomenological *epochè* is an ideal rather than a practice, but it tends toward an opening of consciousness allowing us to return to things themselves and ultimately to rest in ignorance. Attentive listening and non-pressured presence, both part of a process of slowing down, allow us to find a subtle balance between openness and tension, passivity and activity, allowing what comes next to come to us without prejudice, while remaining attentive to it.

The idea of contact with the felt sense is to welcome what comes, to offer it a friendly attitude (and maintain it as it unfolds), and to listen to this feeling that is trying to tell us something, while accepting to be surprised. The freshness - in the sense of 'newness' - of bodily feelings and their variations is also a very important aspect of the Focusing method. By staying with our bodily feelings, we gradually come to understand what only a part of us is aware of, but we don't yet fully know. As we pay more and more attention, our body awareness evolves, often in surprising ways, and new, fresh symbolizations appear. As we listen to our felt sense, at any given moment something in our body may change: for example, we may relax with a deep breath or a tense part of our body, or we may feel that our body is becoming more energetic because something that was being held back has been released. Gendlin calls this change a 'felt shift' to indicate a shift in the felt sense. The felt shift, with the sense of relief that usually accompanies it, is like the immediate benefit of the Focusing process.

The Focusing process, following a person's vital impulse

Gendlin has identified six steps to support the Focusing process, which he suggests be followed in the form of self-Focusing (op. cit.). This autonomous dimension of Focusing is central compared to other mind-body approaches that use suggestions, metaphors, or visualizations to guide change.

Self-direction and self-care are at the heart of the method developed by Gendlin, in line with Rogers' work (1959, 2013) on people's ability to mobilize their own resources and Fisher's reflections (op. cit.) on the function of psychotherapy in influencing life dynamics. This non-pathologizing approach to the situation, aimed at mobilizing the capacities of the individual and those around him or her (people and other people), is reminiscent

of context therapy - or ecotherapy - developed by Roustang (2015). As a non-pathologizing approach, Focusing does not aim to diagnose clients in terms of a 'healthy' state. It seeks to help people mobilize their own resources in the face of a problem situation. It is based on the following six steps.

1 Clearing a space

This first step makes us available to our physical senses. The idea is to relax and pay attention to the inside of our body, to our feelings. We can then ask ourselves: 'How is my life going? Is there anything keeping me from being fully present here and now?' and welcome whatever comes up by feeling it in our body. We can then ask ourselves: 'What if this something was a symbol, an image, etc., what form would it take?' Once the form has emerged, we can place it temporarily (for the duration of the Focusing session) in a place that suits us in order to clear our space. We can do this several times (several cycles) if several concerns arise. It's important not to 'dive' into the concern, but only to recognize it, welcome it, and then place it at a distance. We can then take advantage of the fact that we're clear, experience a certain emptiness - which is already a great benefit! - and continue the process. The metaphor for this step might be that of a cluttered desk that we clean up before getting down to business. What's being cleaned up is neither being discarded (although that's possible!) nor being processed, but it's being set aside for the time of activity, clearing a space.

2 Letting the bodily felt sense come to us

In this second step, we can choose a problem from those that came up in the first step, or we can choose another one to focus on. It can also be a situation that is not necessarily a problem, but one that requires consideration. Without getting into the problem or trying to solve it, we can take the time to put it in the form of a question and then listen to the vague, all-encompassing feeling our

body gives about it. The idea is to feel the totality of our body's response. In fact, the bodily felt sense is the feeling that encompasses 'everything about…' which includes many facets.

3 Finding the 'handle' of the bodily felt sense

Then we can ask ourself: 'What is this vague, all-encompassing feeling like?' and let an image, a word, or a phrase come from the feeling. The idea is to let a 'handle' come in, to capture the bodily feeling in its entirety. It's important to stay with our body feeling until a precise shape fits perfectly. To accompany this step, we can ask ourselves when faced with a shape: 'Is this it?' and wait for the answer from our felt sense - it may be a release or a relief. If the answer seems uncertain or indeterminate, the handle can be clarified iteratively by asking 'Is this it?' at each emergence until the bodily response is affirmed and leads to release.

4 Letting the handle resonate

This step consists of making the handle 'resonate' by moving back and forth between the body sense and the handle, observing how they resonate with each other. To make the handle resonate, we describe it by asking ourselves, for example, 'Where is it? What's it like? What is its shape, colour, intensity, etc.?' For this step, experiential interviewing methods can provide solid support for precise descriptions, e.g. micro-phenomenological interview (Petitmengin 2006; Vermersch 1994, 2012). This method allows easier access to that part of the lived experience that is not immediately accessible to consciousness and verbalization. The goal of this step is to stay in touch with our felt sense.

5 Questioning the handle

We can then question our bodily felt sense through the handle by staying in contact with it. We might ask ourself: 'Does this have anything to teach me about my problem/situation?' or 'What makes me xxx (if xxx were the handle) in this situation?' or 'What makes my problem this way?'. The idea is to allow a bodily

response to these questions without forcing or pressuring because bodily movement cannot be provoked. Gendlin indeed writes: 'Questioning the bodily felt sense is a bit like asking someone a question: once you've asked the question, you wait for the answer' (op. cit.). Something may change in our body, accompanied by a felt shift. This causes a pleasant feeling of relaxation, even when we're in contact with a difficult situation (a 'problem') that has not been resolved (from a rational point of view).

6 Welcoming change

This step is about welcoming without judgment whatever comes with change, even if it's just a little relaxation. Gendlin writes about this step: 'Whatever happens during concentration, accept it. Be happy that your body is speaking to you, whatever the message. A body movement is not final. If you accept it in a friendly way, another will follow' (ibid.).

After this last step, we can direct our attention to what is most important to us in what has just happened in the previous steps. For example, 'how will this help me in my life?'. This could be the seventh step in the process of crystallizing, prototyping and planning.

Focusing as a way to awaken to the care of life

Focusing is a method that allows people to become aware of their feelings without dissociative states. It also helps to identify the bodily meaning of a problem. This method is taught in various institutes - The International Focusing Institute since 1985, the Institut de Focusing d'Europe Francophone since 1990, more recently the Hong-Kong Focusing Institute or the London Focusing Institute, in general with a two- or three-year training course.

Focusing is used within psychotherapy, for various types of problems relating to the relationship with living beings and nature. Its aim is always to contact, listen to and question a

particular feeling, the bodily felt sense, as differentiated by Gendlin from other feelings such as emotions or other bodily information. Clients can be, for example, people depressed by the degradation of the environment around them, stressed by the destruction of living things and the future, sad with a sense of emptiness or denial about the state of the planet, eco-anxious about the inaction of political decision-makers in the face of the ecological crisis, etc. It can be used either for its own sake or in conjunction with other mind-body approaches, especially the person-centered approach of Carl Rogers, with which it has been historically associated since its inception. For example, the 'clearing a space' step is a particularly effective way of making oneself available so that the rest of the session can be approached using a method other than Focusing.

The step of describing the experience by putting it into precise words can be strengthened by techniques that help clarify awareness (Petitmengin op. cit.; Vermersch op. cit.; Vion-Dury and Mougin, 2021). This step gives language an important secondary place, while placing it within the broader framework of a 'holomovement', i.e. a back and forth between symbolization leading to the explicitness of an implicit experiential dimension, and an experience that tests what has been made explicit for experiential verification. This secondariness of language in the face of the primacy of experience resonates with Stern's (2010) micro-analytic discussion, for which contact with experience - present, implicit, always polytemporal and polyphonic - is a source of transformations for people. This author has shown that the forms of vitality present for babies (rhythms, intensity, etc.) that make up the texture of the world - especially the intersubjective matrix - persist into adulthood and can thus be mobilized in therapy, for example through access to bodily meaning. It's also reminiscent of Roustang (op. cit.), for whom intense, precise speech emerges in therapy, astonishing in its precision and

inventiveness, without anyone knowing why this has a therapeutic effect. It's probably because the body has been taken into account in its relational structure, and it is now possible to say something about - and from - its structure.

Focusing is also used within other fields, for instance such as scientific research, to promote 'thinking at the edge' (see Thinking at the Edge, Gendlin, 2004; Hendricks, 2003, 2009). Gendlin has defined the process of accessing, describing, and interrogating this bodily felt sense through contact with lived experience, emphasizing the importance of presence to oneself and to the client as a primordial element in the therapeutic relationship. For Gendlin, 'Experience is a myriad richness that transcends all of its separate facets. It's much more than our conceptual structures can grasp. And experience is in motion - we can't think about everything that has just been. We think more than we can say. We feel more than we can think. We live more than we can feel. And there is much more still' (Unpublished draft 1971).

Contributing to a society that celebrates life

Focusing contributes to the experience of life and belonging to nature and thus participates in the 'practical task' as defined by Fisher (op. cit.), i.e., the development of psychologically based practices or interventions aimed at creating a society honouring and celebrating life. This task involves two overlapping actions: therapeutic practices and reflective practices. Focusing lies at the intersection of these two actions, promoting the celebration of life by giving it full attention.

In therapeutic practices based on Focusing, attentive listening and non-pressured presence, both part of a slowing down process, allow for a subtle balance between openness and tension, reminiscent of the work of (Roustang, op. cit.) who describes 'perceptude' as a state of openness, a floating but attentive awareness of all that is there, a return to things themselves. In the

practice of Focusing, with this openness of consciousness, the therapist is invited to rest in a certain ignorance, accepting that the person s/he is accompanying is always more than any explanation or model, always more than the understanding s/he has of what s/he is experiencing, always more than the ideas or concepts s/he can project onto them. This invitation recalls the work of (Ingold, 2018: 41) who speaks of 'care' and presence: 'Care gives attention an ethical dimension. (...) In order to care for others, we must make space for them in our presence, we must leave them alone so that they can speak to us. But in this sense, leaving them alone does not necessarily mean understanding, let alone explaining. Understanding and explanation belong to that other mode of attention known as verification. In the world of verification, encountering the things we 'understand' allows us to archive them, so that these contents no longer demand anything of us. It's the opposite of 'caring' (...) It's in the insecurity of sharing, not the security of understanding, that we truly open ourselves to others and to the world'. Ingold's reminder is an invitation to vigilance: caution, slowing down, delicacy, and sitting comfortably in ignorance to taste the sweet joy of life taking care of itself. The sharing evoked here is reminiscent of the work of Joanna Macy, for whom it becomes almost impossible to face the enormous challenges that lie ahead unless we are rooted in a spiritual practice that holds life sacred and encourages joyful communion with all other beings.

Examples of concrete applications of Focusing to nature-based work can be found on Focusing training institute websites. We've offered some workshops at academic congresses and conferences for caregivers and helping relationship practitioners (Ollagnier-Beldame & Le Guennic, 2024; Bui & Ollagnier-Beldame, 2022; Ollagnier-Beldame & Liguori, 2022). During these workshops, we used Focusing either in nature or in an urban environment, in this case in close proximity to trees and their ecosystems. With the help

of a collective oral guiding, we first helped people to improve their quality of presence with the situation, with other people and with themselves. Then, with a written framework distributed, we proposed an individual moment of encounter with an other-than-human living being around them, the one who was calling them. The proposed steps invited participants to interact with this being, based on their feelings and the bodily felt sense that manifested itself in its presence. For example, we suggested spending a few minutes simply observing this being while being in touch with inner feeling: noticing the colours, shapes, smells that were present. Or, after spending a few minutes with this being, to let questions come to mind, such as: how does it feel to be you? are you hot? cold? how does it feel to be here? while remaining attentive to the bodily felt sense and its changes. The vast majority of participants found it easy to get into the swing of things, and greatly appreciated the calm and wonder of the experience, while regretting that it didn't last longer - we'd usually suggested thirty minutes. But this also raised questions about the impact of such proposals on people who are not already sensitized to sensitive contact with nature, as was the case for most of the participants in these workshops. At another workshop for the general public (Ollagnier-Beldame & Planche, 2022), we found that this type of proposal can be suitable for a large number of people, provided that the duration of the workshop is long enough - at least an hour - for the experience to set up and unfold qualitatively. Taken together, these workshops show that shifts in perspective are possible, allowing participants to meet an other-than-human as much as to be met by one, as Rufo (2023) also describes. This reciprocity makes it possible to feel a shared strength as well as vulnerability, and can be a lever for interspecific solidarity.

Towards a new ecopsychological language

How can Focusing support the experience of this communion with other-than-human beings? Because it places lived experience at the

centre of its approach, as well as the language for describing that experience, Focusing can contribute to the development of a much more humble way of speaking than that which usually prevails in science: a new way of speaking and thinking that honours the dependence of our bodies and minds on the more than human natural world. In the face of the unnecessary violence inflicted on the rest of nature by a society impervious to anything that stands in the way of 'progress', Fisher (op. cit.) writes that the multivoiced earth is the ultimate context of our social and psychological experience. This productive multivocality is a new ecopsychological language.

In step 5 (*Questioning the handle*) of the Focusing process, during which the person questions the handle, the welcoming of the felt sense and its nonjudgmental description coexists with an analytical intention and also with a poetic language that emerges in a first-person multivocality. At the heart of this language is listening. 'I believe that one of humanity's greatest challenges is to relearn to hear the signs. Before an illness, the murmur of fatigue; before a breakup, the murmur of anger; before an ecological disaster, the murmur of a species. But we can only hear the screams. We're in too much of a hurry, so we need the murmur to understand. But all we have to do is relearn how to listen' writes Testa (2019). Re-learning to listen is one of the great challenges of our time, whether we're talking about ourselves, others, or the planet. In order to listen to another person, I have to listen to myself. This may seem paradoxical in common sense, but in lived experience there is no paradox: the more I listen to myself, in an open, unpressured, available presence, the more I am able to listen to the other person as he or she is. This double movement, towards oneself and towards the other, allows us to humbly experience interbeing, the fact that we are permanently connected to other living beings.

The 'common fund' of living matter

To care in this way with Focusing, in the service of full life (Rogers, op. cit.), is to touch the common ground of living things, i.e., their fundamentally complex, emergent nature, which tends toward equilibrium. Touching this common ground, multiplying these contacts, is essential within the current social and ecological crisis. This is the basis of Fisher's reflexive practical task practices, which aim to remind us how our human psyche is embedded in and nourished by the larger psyche of nature, and to relearn the art of worshipping, rendering, and maintaining reciprocal relationships with the animate world of nature. Asserting that there can be no experience, perception, or self-knowledge without a world in which to bodily interact, touch, and be touched, Abram (1996: 262) argues that the earth - the soil, the wind, the birds, the insects - is the given world to which our sensory life opens, anticipates, and feeds. He writes: 'The human mind is not some otherworldly essence that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather it is instilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth. (…) By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the visible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth (…) Each place its own mind, its own psyche. Oak, madrone, Douglas fir, red-tailed hawk, serpentine in the sandstone, a certain scale to the topography, drenching rains in the winter, fog off-shore in the summer, salmon surging in the streams - all these together make up a particular state of mind, a place-specific intelligence shared by all the humans that dwell therein, but also by the coyotes yapping in those valleys, by the bobcats and the ferns and the spiders, by all beings who live and make their way in that zone.

Each place its own psyche. Each sky its own blue'. Recognizing situated intelligence and nurturing reciprocal relationships is at the heart of Focusing and Gendlin's approach to human beings. Indeed, Gendlin (1978) redefines the human condition as 'interbeing,' emphasizing that what we typically perceive as individual existence is actually a symbiotic relationship with the world and others. This concept, termed 'Interaction First' by Gendlin, shifts the focus from isolated beings interacting to an interconnected, co-creative process. According to him, humans aren't discrete entities merely interacting with each other; rather, they are integral parts of a dynamic continuum of existence, constantly shaping and being shaped by their surroundings. Gendlin challenges the notion of being confined within our physical bodies, asserting that our existence extends beyond our skin, intricately intertwined with the world and others. Therefore, he concludes that viewing humans as separate entities is untenable; instead, we are fundamentally interdependent, embodying the concept of interbeing.

An experiential policy for peace

Lastly, Focusing's ubiquitous reference to subjective experience is a bulwark against political and social alienation. Indeed, contact with one's bodily senses is a holistic experience that allows the individual to contact his or her wholeness from a revolutionary pause within a force for peace. For Fisher (op. cit.), humans will never find happiness through the 'progressive' degradation of the rest of the natural world, even though our economic and technological system has made suffering a perverse necessity: to increasingly exploit both humans and the natural world, thus creating a state of psychospiritual ruin and ecological crisis. Gendlin's work gives authority to lived experience by contacting it, listening to it, and taking it as a starting point for action. In this way, it contributes to an experiential politics that is a counter-practice to the destruction of life wrought by our current economic

and technological system. It revives a meaningful, reciprocal and peaceful engagement with the human and other-than-human natural world.

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