

Liberated Body: Embodiment, Releasement, and Returning to One's Own Ground

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Abstract:

This paper explores the role of the lived body in existential psychotherapy through an embodied and phenomenological framework that brings together philosophy, clinical practice, and somatic inquiry. Drawing on the work of Heidegger, Merleau Ponty, Sartre, Binswanger, Gendlin, Levinas, Weil, and recent contemplative science, it presents a three-part process of embodiment, releasement, and return as a continuous form of unfolding through which experience loosens, opens, and finds a widened horizon. The discussion describes the felt awareness as both a limit and an opening, a place where freedom and finitude meet, where implicit memory becomes visible, and where meaning forms again within the relational and temporal field. Therapeutic practices that include focused intentionality, somatic presence, sensory awareness, and guided attention illustrate how the body functions as the first realm of relation and as a living testimony of experience. The paper considers epistemic trust, intersubjective presence, and mutuality as essential conditions for embodied dialogue, and describes how vulnerability, responsibility, and grace arise through the meeting of self and other. By following the subtle interplay of nothingness, attunement, and embodied presence, this work presents existential psychotherapy as a practice of entering life with greater presence, through the body and through the possibilities that remain available even when constraint is present.

Introduction

This paper presents a phenomenological approach to psychotherapy that centres the lived body as the foundation of meaning and transformation. Drawing on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Binswanger, Gendlin, Sartre and many other philosophers, psychotherapists and contemporary figures, it explores how bodily awareness and sensory experience shape human understanding of being. The discussion also attends to attunement, limitation, boundary, sensitivity, silence, and dialogue, which are the subtle dimensions through which embodiment conveys meaning. Together, these elements create the language of presence that allows experience to be felt, recognised, and expressed in therapy. Freedom is a gravitational force in existence that pulls one in different directions. Being free or having a lack of freedom brings different connotations and results in different and diverse lived experiences in each of us. Exploring the concept of freedom is a complex endeavour. Because it is a much expansive theme than simply being fit in one existential dimension, and moreover is intertwined with all aspects of the existential dimensionality. Embodiment acts as a limit that reveals freedom. However, being embodied can pose a privilege. It offers a bracket by simply being bound to limits, to explore what is happening within our experience phenomenologically. Even though we do not think about freedom constantly in our lived experiences, we experience repression and oppression through what our bodies tell us. In this paper, I will explore a methodology through which we can explore our lived experience phenomenologically through utilising an existential lens and a deep inquiry through embodiment.

Therapeutic presence unfolds through three interrelated movements that form a triangle of existential process. This triangle, composed of embodiment, releasement, and return, reflects the rhythm of lived experience and offers a structure for both personal and clinical exploration.

Embodiment anchors awareness in what is tangible: contact with breath, gravity, and sensation. It is the act of being with one's situation as it unfolds non-linearly in time.

Releasement, a term drawn from Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* (1959), a term for a letting-be that softens grasping, invites an expansion and smoothness towards fixed meaning and habitual defence. Through this horizon widens, and phenomena reveal themselves more clearly without usual limitations.

Return completes the cycle through re-embodiment. It brings insight back into the lived world, opens a possibility to an understanding, coming back to the self, by translating attunement into awareness.

This triangle will appear throughout the article as an orientation for therapeutic inquiry. This tri-faceted movement does not follow a linear path. It resembles breathing, where engagement alternates with letting go and re-entry. The therapist and client can learn to sense where they dwell within this rhythm—whether grounded, suspended, or integrating. Each point of the triangle offers an existential invitation: to inhabit, to release, or to re-form. The triangle represents a living process of contact and renewal that can be revisited whenever life becomes constricted or meaning fades.

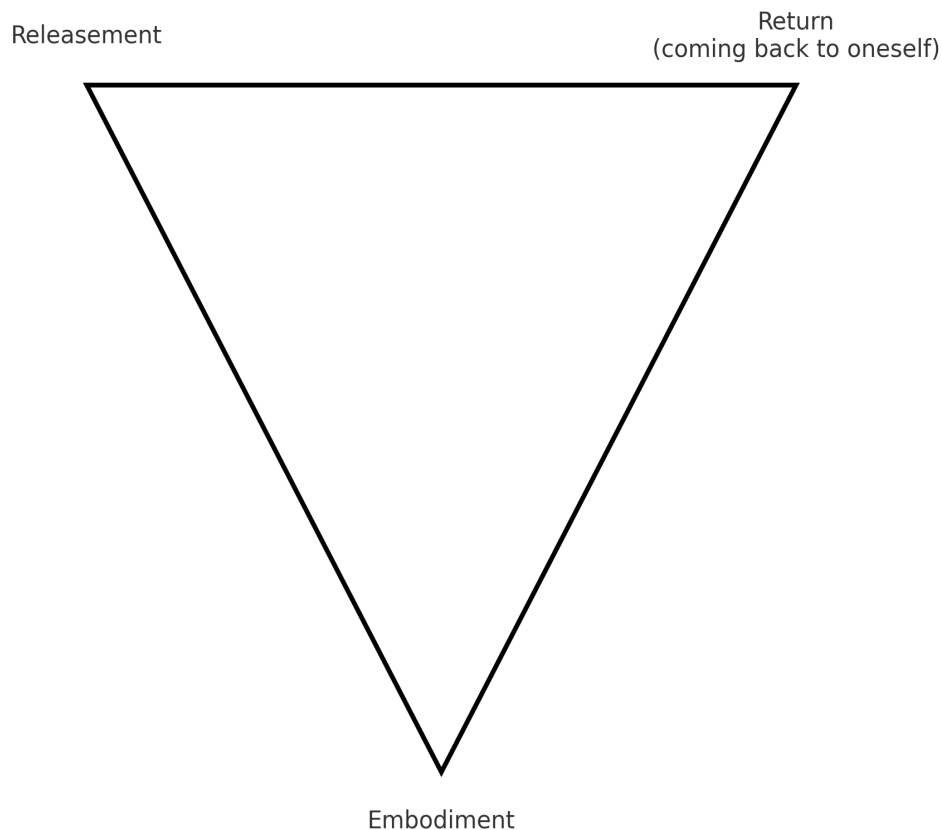


Figure 1. The Embodiment–Releasement–Return Triangle (Tuncel, 2025).

At the centre of this movement lies the question of attention—how awareness is directed and what kind of presence it creates. Rollo May (1969) described intentionality as the capacity to participate in the structure of meaning itself. For Brentano(1874/1995) intention was definitive of conscious life. Husserl(1962/1977) regarded the object that is intended as the subject to the epochē. Intention is focused attention regardless of its interior or exterior locus, or the type of correlation between noesis and noema. Intentionality reflects the organism’s natural tendency to reach toward significance. It is the intersection through which existence touches and is touched by the world.

In therapeutic practice, intentionality gains depth through cultivation. Although attention is not continual, it can be directed through the gaze and intentional focus. Focused Intentionality^[1] is the term I propose for a deliberate, embodied direction of awareness that remains both

grounded and open. Focused Intentionality is not only the cognitive narrowing of concentration; but also it is a disciplined receptivity that carries both ethical and relational meaning. It develops from the therapist's ability to hold curiosity while maintaining responsibility toward the other.

Gene Gendlin's work on *Focusing* (1962) provides a concrete way to engage this process. The *felt sense* that Gendlin described refers to an experiential and embodied awareness of a situation before it is formed toward a language. Focusing invites the therapist and client to attend to this implicit knowing with patience and curiosity. Through such embodied attention, meaning emerges from within experience itself. The therapist's role is to create the conditions in which this meaning can unfold naturally, supplemented by the therapist's emotional dwelling capacity. Gendlin's inward listening and Levinas's outward responsibility add dimension to this capacity, that depict two movements of the same awareness: one directed toward the self's unfolding, the other toward the presence of the Other.

Emmanuel Levinas adds an ethical horizon to this discussion. In *Totality and Infinity* (1969/1961), he defines intentionality as an openness, already being a responsibility. This statement reframes awareness as an ethical act. To direct attention toward another is to assume a form of responsibility for their presence despite the vulnerability it brings. In this light, perception becomes ethical, responsible and autonomous. The therapist's focused awareness and the gaze^[2] carry weight because it recognises the other without reducing them to a category or interpretation. Such awareness can be considered as an expression of care^[3] that acknowledges the other as both separate and relationally bound.

Focused Intentionality sustains the movement through embodiment, releasement, and return. In embodiment, it refines sensitivity to immediate experience. In releasement, it supports the suspension of habitual interpretation. In return, it guides awareness back into relational engagement. It functions both as compass and pulse, orienting the therapist and client within the evolving rhythm of being.

Embodiment grounds awareness in the immediacy of life. Releasement opens perception to possibility. Return integrates awareness into relationship and action. The triangle of these movements is animated by Focused Intentionality, which unites curiosity with ethical presence. This process transforms therapy into a dialogue of being rather than a corrective procedure. Through this rhythm, the body, mind, and relational field become a living continuum of perception and meaning.

The following chapter situates this framework within the history of psychotherapy and philosophy, tracing how the body, once marginalised in theory and practice, returns as the ground of phenomenological exploration and the site where meaning continually renews itself. Through this integrative lens, the therapeutic relationship becomes an inquiry into being itself. The lived body stands as both a question and answer, revealing the silent continuity between perception, movement, and meaning.

In what follows, we will trace this movement from the lived body through its hidden layers, toward the openness of nothingness, the shaping force of intention, and finally the relational field where freedom and grace become possible.

Beginnings

In the near history, the presence of the body was excluded from the operations of the empirical mind and the internal world in the wider scholarly sense. Physical dimension of our realities

was considered as a relatively raw facet of our existence, treated as a possession rather than recognised as an intermediary, reciprocal field of existence. Western psychotherapeutic traditions have placed greater emphasis on cognitive insight and linguistic articulation than on bodily experience. This perspective, shaped by Cartesian dualism, positioned the body on the margins of clinical thought. It was often delegated to the domains of neurology or psychosomatic medicine rather than regarded as a co-participant in psychotherapy. Freud (1895/ 2001) recognised the hysteria through expression of unconscious ideas that have been converted into bodily phenomena, and defined ego as being ultimately derived from body sensations (1923), and Reich (1933/1970) described the formation of “muscular armour” as the somatic expression of the inhibition of emotional expression, viewing embodiment as a defensive organisation. Although both made significant contributions, their ideas were usually interpreted through mechanistic models that separated body from meaning.

An existential approach that integrates existential philosophy with somatic psychology seeks to heal this separation. This integrated approach forms the basis of the framework developed in this paper. These approaches understand the body as the foundation of being and the origin of perception. Based on the philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Heidegger, existential aspect of embodiment entails a ‘membership’ to the world which engages us and makes us a part of it (Ashworth, 2017). Merleau-Ponty (1962) described perception and movement as the very structure of consciousness. He viewed human experience as inherently embodied and saw the body as the centre of our relation to the world. He came up with the concept of “lived body” which was later reconceptualised as “embodied cognition” (Varela et al., 1991). According to Merleau-Ponty perception is not a judgment made by the mind, but a bodily way of inhabiting the world. This perception was considered not only as a sensory contributor to mental processes but also recognised the embodied experience as a way of thinking, not being separate from the mind itself (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011). Heidegger (1962) deepened this understanding through his notion of *Dasein*, showing that existence always unfolds through situation and finitude. Being is inseparable from the condition of embodiment and the context of worldliness.

Diverse modalities around somatic psychotherapy enrich this understanding. The therapeutic gaze turns toward the lived body as the ground of human experience. Recent developments in trauma research (van der Kolk, 2014), interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 1999), and advancements in somatic research have strengthened this shift. The body has begun to be understood as an intermediary space of expression, regulation, and transformation. It participates in the process of meaning-making through its own language of gesture, posture, tone and adaptability. However, these methodologies may prioritise method over phenomena, resulting in accounts that appear as crystal cut. The contribution of existential therapies lies instead in offering a way of responding to ontic reality through rigorous and precise descriptions of intentional modes of consciousness (Kearney, 1984). This tension between methodological elaboration and phenomenological fidelity invites a return to the philosophical foundations of embodiment, where the body is equally important as being the existential condition of being-in-the-world and not necessarily a site for intervention, being set aside from the totality of the being.

Heidegger viewed human beings as embodied presences thrown into existence, each carrying a particular positionality within *Dasein*. Our engagement with the world becomes possible through embodied experience, through physical presence. Merleau-Ponty (1945) described embodiment as the primary condition through which the world becomes accessible. It opens

a fundamental dimension of existence in which self and world are disclosed in a reversible relation, each appearing through the other. Counter effects emerge simultaneously, which creates the possibility of being affected and affecting. In Structured Existential Analysis (van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2025), the dimension of *Umwelt* includes our relationship with the physical world and everything that shapes this connection[4]. *Umwelt* is not only the physical surroundings but also includes all the intermediators of our physical experience, such as our sensorial and existential situation. This includes physical autonomy, health and illness, strength and weakness, sensory experience, contact with others, food and drink, comfort and discomfort, the natural environment, light and darkness, time, sexuality, procreation, and mortality. Work with the body allows us to access these interwoven layers of existence that are connected horizontally across daily life and vertically across the other existential dimensions of *Eigenwelt*, *Mitwelt*, and *Überwelt*.

This chapter proposes an existential-phenomenological framework for embodied psychotherapy that positions the phenomenology of embodiment as the central pathway of somatic inquiry. It draws on Anzieu's concept of the Skin Ego (1990) which poses a highly fragile and liminal form of being[5], Gendlin's *felt sense* as a tool for reconnecting with our physicality, Porges's polyvagal theory[6] to expand our ideas on a high functioning relationality, and many other the insights of philosophy, psychotherapy, mindfulness and movement-based approaches. Through this synthesis, the therapeutic relationship becomes an exploration of the dialogic nature of embodied existence and existential meaning.

The following discussions examine the philosophical significance of the lived body, its role as the psychophysical matrix of dialogue, and the relevance of psychotherapeutic and existential concepts to our understanding of embodiment. Integrating somatic and existential methods with the hope of creating new possibilities for addressing trauma, identity, and relational fractures through presence, attunement, and shared awareness through the problem of being-constricted-in-the-world.

Embodied Forgetfulness

Every psychological difficulty carries within it a hidden logic. What appears as a problem is often the body's attempt to resolve a conflict that consciousness could not contain. The body continues to seek balance long after the mind has lost track of what caused the imbalance. This movement between awareness and distraction forms the field of embodied forgetfulness.

To imagine this more vividly, one might picture a person sitting in a boat on calm water. The scene evokes reflection and readiness. Beneath the tranquil surface lies a world of unseen movement and colour. The still surface hides a vibrant depth that continues to move and breathe beneath awareness, which continues to pulse and shift. This image reflects how the inner world operates. Beneath apparent calm, unprocessed sensations and memories remain active. The body serves as the vessel that holds these hidden depths.

Embodied forgetfulness describes the way unintegrated experiences become absorbed into the sensory layers of being. The body stores what the conscious mind could not process. It holds memories that never found language, gestures that were never completed, and impulses that were restrained. These traces persist as patterns of tension, withdrawal, or absence. They influence posture, breath, movement, and perception, shaping the person's manner of being in the world.

Heidegger's distinction between awareness and forgetfulness offers a way to understand how the implicit embodied cues from the lived experience operate beneath conscious life. Heidegger described two fundamental modes of *Dasein*: awareness and forgetfulness (Heidegger, 1977/1949). Awareness opens the possibility of choice and authenticity. Forgetfulness conceals this possibility through repetition and unexamined habit. In therapy, both tendencies coexist. Awareness is cultivated through attention, curiosity, and care. Forgetfulness reveals itself in habitual gestures, rigid movements, and silence. The purpose of therapy is not to erase forgetfulness but to listen to it, to allow what has been muted to express itself again, and to which form the muted dialogue had been shifted.

Phenomenology provides the means for this listening. Through *epoché*, the therapist suspends habitual interpretation to make room for what has remained unspoken. Through Focused Intentionality, the therapist holds awareness steady enough to receive what has not yet found language. This ethical attention bridges the silence of the body and the emergence of meaning. The therapist observes small details: a pause in the breath, a shift in tone, a change in temperature or colour of the skin. These phenomena are testimonies to what is really happening and what the narrative transforms into. Each gesture contains a history, and each silence becomes a threshold full of potentiality through which new awareness can emerge.

The therapist works with both language and silence. Verbal expression offers narrative and structure, while the body communicates through rhythm, gesture, and movement. A tremor in the jaw may hold more truth than an articulate explanation. To stay with what appears without attempting to control it requires humility and patience. The therapist allows meaning to unfold through presence rather than analysis. The aim is to bridge the distance between awareness and forgetfulness, creating space for the forgotten to return to dialogue.

This humility echoes Montaigne's question, *Que sais-je?*—"What do I know?"^[7] (Montaigne, 1580/1993, p. 105)—capture this therapeutic attitude. The therapist approaches each encounter with humility and openness. This form of not-knowing is an ethical stance that honours the mystery of the other's experience. It recognises that knowledge cannot be imposed but must be discovered together towards an understanding.

In embodied forgetfulness, the unknown holds a potential. The forgotten carries the possibility of transformation once it is met by awareness. When the body begins to express what was silenced, it reconnects with the world. Movement, breath, and sensation become languages of reconciliation, forming a third base of expanding meaning that lifts the heavy weight of a limited existence. Therapy restores conversation between what has been remembered and what has been hidden even from the self.

Remembering is a bodily act. To remember is to re-member, to bring the parts of the self back into relationship. In this sense, remembering evokes more of a relational connotation: something that emerges through the embodied experience as it meets the world again. Each attended gesture unites past and present, inner and outer experience. So it must be kept in mind that these practices on embodiment, which will be posed in the following chapter, will bring back new unintegrated memories^[8], which will require *sorge* and an integrative work of change. Change often begins quietly. A small shift in posture, a single exhale, or a deepened breath may signal a profound reorganisation. Through this renewed contract, one can experience a sense of coherence and continuity while remaining open to change.

Embodied forgetfulness opens a pathway to deeper dimensions of existence. It reminds us that human life unfolds through cycles of remembering and forgetting, contraction and expansion as a shared movement between the single cell we have and the entire fabric of the universe itself. The therapeutic process also follows these rhythms, guided by focused intentionality. When awareness meets with patience and care (that used to be on partial hold), meaning begins to move again. Heidegger described forgetfulness of Being as the loss of attunement to presence. In therapy, releasement becomes a way of restoring this contact, allowing an expansion to bring back the quality of what has been forgotten to breathe again. The person does not retrieve a lost part of self but learns to inhabit life with greater coherence, choice and autonomy, which is grounded in a body that remembers even when the mind does not. Anzieu's (1990) elaboration of the Skin-Ego deepens this orientation by situating embodiment at the level of the body's surface, understood as a perceptual and relational envelope. This envelope functions as a holding and registering medium through which contact, separation, and relational trace are inscribed prior to reflective articulation. In this way, Anzieu's account complements the embodied stance developed here by indicating that the earliest horizon of meaning emerges at the tactile frontier of the self, where experience is first gathered, contained, and made available to consciousness. This relationality is vividly echoed in certain artworks^[9] that portray the vulnerability and permeability of the embodied self. However, while artworks and embodied imagery can open third spaces for exploration, existential psychotherapy approaches these dynamics through a more direct orientation: phenomenology.

Phenomenology and the Lived Body

Phenomenological inquiry provides the ground for releasement, the widening of perception that loosens habitual meanings. Phenomenology, developed by Husserl^[10] and expanded by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Levinas and translated to the world of practice and research by Michel Henry, Van Deurzen and Van Manen, forms the philosophical foundation of existential psychotherapy. Existential therapy is particularly interested in the phenomenology of interiority as developed by Michel Henry (1973). The objective of Henry was unifying the understanding of ourselves and the world and the way we make sense of it (Arnold-Baker & Van Deurzen, 2025). While this project foregrounds interiority as the site of phenomenological disclosure, it leaves open the question of how such unity is given concretely within lived bodily experience. Zaner (1971) in his detailed account on embodiment, clarifies embodiment as a continuously operative phenomenological condition through which consciousness is given its own animate organism as uniquely its own. The body-proper is constituted as "mine" through this ongoing embodiment, within which bodily expressivity and self-manifestation are mutually founded without recourse to identity claims or mediating operations. Embodiment thus designates the condition of appearing in which consciousness is at once bodily actualised and intersubjectively available, sustaining a constitutive ambiguity between self-presence and worldly manifestation (Zaner, 1971). This account of embodiment differs from Henry's notion of auto-affective life, in that embodiment is here treated as a condition of appearing within the world rather than as an immanent phenomenality withdrawn from intentional relations.

Phenomenology not only offers a way to describe how the experience unfolds but it also provides tools to understand how it is perceived relationally in unity with the affect. When

phenomenology comes into practice Van Manen (2014) broadens the palette of our toolbox by adding hermeneutics, heuristics, ontological, experiential, ethical and radical reduction. In this view, the body can be reevaluated in many ways: the role of it in shaping our ethics, the meaning it carries, the functionality it provides in how to be with ourselves in our worlds, the liminal space it provides and the ways of interpreting and understanding this finite and transient feature of our existence and also the medium through which the world becomes experiential. It is the meeting point of perception, relation, and understanding (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Phenomenology bridges the ontic—the concrete events of bodily life—and the ontological—the structures of being that give them form. Directing attention to embodiment allows the visible and material to open toward the essential. Working phenomenologically begins with Husserl's *epoché*, the suspension of assumptions that allows the therapist to meet each phenomenon with fresh eyes. Drawn on Van Manen, working phenomenologically we can ask how the body is experienced in respect to the phenomena. Is it an object or a subject? As the body is passed over in silence as Sartre would say, what is it not telling? What is missing in awareness? How do the individual, relational or collective themes reverberate through the body? Through phenomenological reduction, the therapist looks for the pure description which can reach the viewer through different modalities coming from the subjective lived experience: for instance to explore what it is like to feel breath constricted by grief or to sense trembling as the body remembers loss, both together with and free from the narrative itself. The raw immediacy of such experiences opens a path toward meaning. And a therapist can do much more, by integrating other practical tools that phenomenology brings and create an arena to perceive and understand true effect (true to us) of having an embodied presence.

Heidegger extended Husserl's project by shifting phenomenology from consciousness to existence itself. Heidegger redefined phenomenology as an inquiry into Being. He described *Dasein* as existence that is always immersed in a meaningful world. Human life is an embodied engagement. We live through experiences in a sensed manner. Ludwig Binswanger (1963) brought this existential insight into psychotherapy and emphasised that psychological disturbance must be understood through the way a person inhabits their world. Experience is shaped through embodiment and time, as the body both remembers and anticipates. Rollo May (1983) highlighted the difference between adaptation and adjustment in the *Umwelt*. He observed, "I adapt to cold water, but I adjust to my periodic need for sleep." The weather remains unchanged through adaptation, since my adjustment has no influence on it. Adaptation occurs within a shared presence and the fact that we are always in a mood (Heidegger, 1962) (attuned to the Being in different levels and through diverse modalities), brings emphasis to our embodied perception.

Among nineteenth-century existential thinkers, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard placed the body at the centre of their philosophical vision. Kierkegaard saw the body as the meeting place of spirit and limitation. In *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), he described the self as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal. Anxiety arises at this threshold. The body is therefore the arena where freedom, choice, and responsibility come into tension. Far from obstructing spirituality, it provides the ground for it. Nietzsche transformed embodiment into a principle of knowledge and creativity. He viewed the body as an active intelligence that grounds thought in life itself. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883/1978), he wrote that there is more wisdom in our bodies than our deepest learning. This declaration anticipates phenomenology by locating thought within the vitality of existence. To think with one's body is to participate fully in life and to allow awareness to emerge from experience.

Binswanger elaborated further on embodiment by distinguishing between the living body, the physical body, and corporeality. Sartre^[11] illustrated the multilayered notion of physical being in Being and Nothingness. Binswanger considered the body to be the sphere where identity and materiality converge. When a person imagines how they wish to live physically, that wish shapes perception through the *Eigenwelt*. The density and gravity of the body provide a necessary counterweight to abstraction. Through this rootedness, existence finds coherence within the world. Merleau-Ponty described the “lived body” (*corps propre*) as the hinge between self and world. This notion puts the concept of the body at a place where being physical is more valid than possessing something physical. In therapy, every gesture, shift in posture, or movement of breath expresses meaning. These expressions, which are non-possessive (not one’s own only but also relational in *Mitwelt* as in a sense that is partially borrowed) and highly reversible, invite the therapist to meet them with resonance rather than interpretation.

Gendlin (1962) developed the idea of the “felt sense,” an embodied awareness that contains meaning before language. His method of Focusing teaches the client to pause, sense inwardly, and let words emerge from within experience. This practice aligns with the phenomenological invitation to let what shows itself reveal its own form. Spinelli (2005) translated these philosophical ideas into clinical work. He described phenomenological therapy as a discipline of openness to uncertainty and ambiguity. It requires the therapist to remain attentive to the client’s expressions and to their own embodied responses within the encounter, also by acknowledging the totality of the *Umwelt*, as willing to acknowledge the entire scene within and around. The process is collaborative and continually unfolding.

As the embodied aspect of the being tied to *Umwelt* with strong bonds, this aspect of the physicality creates an underlying tension. This tension is between the lack of something and the sense of fullness, in other words, between hunger and thirst, which are inherently physical qualities. The feeling of a lack of something is so powerful that it changes our path to a no-lack direction. It is a manipulative force which uses the embodied notion of the being, and the dilemma is, although there is no lack of anything in the physical world (there is enough resource for everyone), it is not evenly distributed due to the evil, as Weil (2002) would put it or as May (1973) or Diamond (1996) would say daimonic. These shadowed dimensions from all parts of existence find a ground for operating in the *Umwelt* and step in as it is hard to endure a powerless state of no-thing, and with this primitive urge, our realities become altered, ontological, the priorities change. This underlying current, which affects everything, is hard to accept and tolerate and becomes easily buried; however, it remains embodied in attitude, attunement and experience.

Gabor Maté (2005) explored this particular quality of embodied expression: How repression manifests within the body. He defined repression as experiences that are denied or disowned and which often reappear as physical or emotional symptoms. As an example, he noted that women who suppress the distress of relational conflict are several times more likely to develop life-threatening illness than those who express their inner world. The refusal of the body’s truth becomes a form of self-betrayal that disrupts health and coherence. As Bugenthal, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty agreed on the condition of the body that is ever-present, it is also a site that represents fullness, both in the form of acknowledged and unacknowledged. May (1969) calls this area daimonic^[12]; as a function which facilitates the repressed parts that are uncontrollable, overwhelming or primitive in a way that is hard to accept. As Carl Rogers (1957) said, we must hate as we love, as we (humans) carry the seeds of our own destruction

within. So there is a lot in the body that we also cannot directly see or experience. Whilst these influences can also be quite indirect, it is not surprising that many remain non-vocal and non-verbal. If the emphasis is on embodiment, we must approach the body as an aspect of the being which is fragile in both a vulnerable and an explosive way, and be mindful of the pace and level of disclosure of the work in the meantime. As the phenomenology is focused on a ground that is both limited in a physical manner and also deep in an unseen manner, this work requires spaciousness where the being can release. This phenomenological grounding prepares the way for a more practical inquiry into how these embodied dimensions can be engaged in therapy.

Focusing on No-Thing[\[13\]](#)

Every embodied experience begins with something that cannot be fully located. The triangle of embodiment, releasement, and return offers a rhythm of awareness; yet one may wonder what lies beneath its first base. What silent quality accompanies embodiment through every movement, every breath, and every renewal? When this question is held long enough, a subtle dimension of presence becomes perceptible with a quiet openness that sustains the unfolding of life.

This openness is the field of *no-thing*: an awareness that does not vanish when form disappears, an unoccupied ground that carries experience through each transformation. The density of daily facticity often conceals it, yet it remains present underneath the immediacy of living. Focusing, as Eugene Gendlin (1962, 1981) described, provides a pathway into this field. Through attending to the body's felt sense, awareness moves from fixed form toward fluid presence. The practice begins here, in the disciplined act of sensing what is alive but still unformed.

Philosophically, no-thing connotes something more than the absence or the void. Heidegger (1927/ 1962) approached it as the horizon in which Being becomes visible. When the familiar structure of things loosens, existence reveals its depth as openness. Sartre (1943/ 2003) transformed this ontological insight into an existential one: consciousness, he argued, is a nothingness which reveals being through its own negation. Through awareness, being reflects upon itself and discovers freedom.

This freedom, however, is not distant from the sense of the body. The first encounter with the triangle (embodiment) already rests upon the same openness that sustains no-thing. A state that acknowledges the body, but it is not yet informed by it. To feel the body's weight is also to sense the invisible ground that carries it. But having a ground is limiting as relieving as it is. However, there is another kind of spaciousness within infinity. Simon Weil (1947/ 2002) took a spiritual stance towards the void. According to Weil, the soul tends to fill an entire space[\[14\]](#) which is given it, hardly leaving room for anything else. Enduring the void is a matter of resilience. In dialogue, silence can be a tool for exercising power. But in solitude, a silent endurance to the void is also where there is a lack of power. Therefore, it is extremely hard against every tendency that we have. But has a great potentiality: the invitation of grace. This void for Weil is also a place of the night; it is nearly an impossible task, supernatural, as she put it. However, it is her answer to the evil, as Rollo May interprets, as the daimonic. This can also pose a path for therapeutic awareness. We seek freedom and discovery. But we cannot do it without shedding light on the shadow. So can we endure the invalidity of solitude and be present enough to invite grace to our being?

When we try this objectless state of the practice (as a form of meditation), we can see what our space is particularly inviting. Can our will cease as well and create space for grace, or intervene and invite something else that is yet to be anticipated? This practice reintroduces this awareness without the immediacy of sensory experience. Focusing is a process: an unformed whole that contains meaning before language. In this way, focusing becomes a phenomenological act of return to the starting point of experience, regardless of the tone of quality it has. It leads attention beneath conceptual form toward the openness from which form arises.

When attention rests long enough in the field of no-thing, a further opening becomes possible, a moment in which even the act of attending ceases. This transition marks the passage from no-thingness to what contemplative science describes as cessation, a brief suspension of conceptualisation, perception, and identity. Agrawal and Laukkonen (2024) define this event as a discontinuity in consciousness, an instant when the stream of experience pauses and re-emerges. Far from annihilation, such a pause functions as a recalibration of being; awareness returns and becomes unbound from habitual prediction and identification.

Cessation or with a different language from another field; *śūnyatā* (Anālayo, 2015; Burbea, 2014) belong to the same horizon, yet they gesture toward different aspects of experience. *Śūnyatā* reveals the interdependent nature of phenomena, showing that all forms, including self and world, arise through mutual conditioning. The meditative concept of cessation embodies this insight directly. It is the lived suspension through which relationality becomes evident, an enactment of release that gives depth to perception.

The invitation to approach this experiential nothingness does not originate from Sartre's existential analysis but from a contemporary figure, Joe Dispenza (2017; 2019). Although originating outside the traditional phenomenological canon, Dispenza's approach provides a practical doorway into the same experiential openness described by existential thinkers. In Dispenza's methodology, the existential notion of nothingness turns into practice; early-morning meditation guides practitioners to become "no one, no thing, nowhere, in no time." This guidance offers a practical way to enter the same field of suspension that philosophers theoretically approached through reflection. This is a bridge between mindfulness and existential theory, where this reflection relates to an embodied reference. Recent contemplative neuroscience lends empirical support to this process. When awareness withdraws from sensory engagement and habitual prediction, large-scale alpha activity in the brain decreases, signalling a quieting of self-referential processing (a thinning of the veil in between existential dimensions). At the same time, transient bursts of gamma synchronisation appear, reflecting the unlearning of conditioned mental patterns (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Laukkonen et al., 2023). Functional networks such as the default-mode and salience networks relax their dominance, allowing greater coherence between sensory, emotional, and cognitive systems (Agrawal & Laukkonen, 2024), which might have been reinterpreted as a form of Heideggerian releasement. While these findings emerge from neuroscience rather than philosophy, they illuminate the same process of unlearning and openness that existential thinkers describe.

Intentional experiential nothingness, which connotes more than a simplified diminishing of consciousness, produces an expansion that reorganises neural communication toward integration, stability, and creative openness, which is the kind of quality that can be derived from Levinas (2003/ 1972). This openness can be explored in depth in Levinas's philosophy,

as something that is beyond the essence of being, a vulnerable form of uncoveredness, which is ready to relate with something that is otherwise than being.

From an existential-phenomenological perspective, this movement can be understood as the *clearing* (Heidegger's *Lichtung*) (Heidegger, 1927/ 1962) in which Being becomes perceptible again. It accompanies embodiment through every gesture and breath, waiting beneath the surface of activity. Dwelling here reveals the body as a threshold and the world as an unfolding presence and also an availability for connection with new possibilities. In such stillness, even freedom might have appeared as a gift of the clearing, releasement and openness[15].

This movement from the embodied to the unformed completes the first rhythm of practice. The following chapter turns toward focused intention, where the expansion born from nothingness begins to take direction (which is a mystery until it is discovered), shaping awareness into creative participation with life.

Therapeutic Tools and Embodied Practice

“My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is through it that I know the world.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012, p. 147)

The integration of sensory awareness into existential psychotherapy calls for practices that translate openness into lived presence. Focused intention emerges here as the active complement for exploration, an attitude of readiness that allows being to take shape through directed awareness. It is a motive for participation and attunement. In therapy, this stance invites both therapist and client to dwell within the unfolding of experience while gently guiding its expression into form.

Somatic and phenomenological approaches provide a language for this translation. In *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy* (Ogden & Fisher, 2015), therapists learn to recognise micro-movements, postural shifts, and breath patterns as doorways to meaning. When a client inclines into paralysis while recounting a memory, attention can be redirected toward the soles of the feet or the rhythm of breathing, helping them to ground themselves by the invitation of another existential dimension and ultimately a version of safety. Dan Siegel's *Wheel of Awareness* (2010) expands this practice by inviting clients to observe sensations, thoughts, and relational energy from a steady centre of consciousness. As the field of awareness widens, perception begins to hold opposites such as pain and relief, movement and stillness, despair and meaning without losing coherence, in the event horizon in the form of peaks and plateaus. In existential terms, this is a gesture toward freedom and integration, a way of inhabiting choice within constraint. Emmy van Deurzen's *Emotional Compass* (2010) offers another map for this terrain. It situates emotions along existential polarities such as joy and sadness, hope and despair, anger and peace, revealing the values and meanings that each emotion projects. When a somatic sensation is recognised within this compass, it exceeds the simple description of being only a tension; it becomes a reflection of a much complex environment.

The body is the first relational field. Imagine that someone new walks into a room, and in an instant, your body reacts, even without knowing who that person is. Despite this contradictory fact of having no explicit evidence of who that person is, you get an embodied affect stemming

from the Mitsein. Although a sensory feeling toward relationality may not be the first indicator of an encounter in many cases as well, this particular narrative exemplifies a narrative where, particularly, the body becomes a silent first encounter for relationality. Within it, contact, distance, and meaning coexist. When attention slows, subtleties in rhythm and tone begin to speak. A change in pace can reveal a hidden truth; slowness itself becomes a method. Through altered tempo, perception widens[16], allowing the person to experience the reciprocity between contraction and release, density and space. Transformation begins as an unhurried recognition of what is already occurring. When witnessed in this way, even the smallest movement carries significance. The therapist's presence provides containment, coherence, and confirmation of what has shifted. Transformation becomes a shared event rather than being only a solitary occurrence.

Grounding Practice:

To ground this process, I will introduce a practice that begins with the simple act of turning the focused attention intentionally toward the body.

Let us start by noticing the body as it is. Feel where it meets the chair and let gravity take over. Which side feels heavier?

Is the centre of gravity forward or back? Notice the feet. Where do they touch the floor?

Bring awareness to the rhythm of breathing. Is it wide or narrow, smooth or hesitant? Turn the head slowly to the right, then to the left. Which direction invites ease?

Allow each observation to stand as it is, without correction or judgement. We are not changing the body but meeting it as it presents itself now.

If standing, notice which foot bears more weight. Let the knees soften and sense where balance falls—front, back, left, or right. Feel how the ground answers your stance.

If lying down, feel the imprint of your back as if lying on the surface of the sand. Where are the hollows, the spaces that do not meet the surface? Which side rests deeper?

Can you sense the curves connecting shoulders, spine, and hips? Where does breath travel most freely?

These questions awaken the pre-reflective dialogue between body and world, turning awareness into an act of recognition.

From this orientation, grounding becomes a way to create a temporary home for experience.

Bring attention to the breath. Inhale gently through the nose, exhale softly through the mouth with a quiet “ah.” If you wish, add a vibration such as “mm” or “vuu” and place a hand where the sound resonates. Let the exhalation lengthen without effort and notice what softens. Sense the weight of the body resting into the ground.

Grounding does not mean withdrawal but return; it opens what Heidegger (1962/1927) called the clearing, a space in which Being becomes perceptible.

Practice for training the mind for imagination:

Focused intention grows through practices that train the mind to stay attentive within simplicity. Now let's test that with a specific and step-by-step practice.

Choose a small object which has a clear brightness to it: that can be a candle flame. Now, having chosen the object, observe it quietly. Let your gaze rest upon it as if you were learning

its presence through light and looking at it with fresh eyes, with the intention of desiring to explore something for the first time. Notice the contrast between brightness and shadow, the way the air moves around it, and the alterations of colour from centre to periphery. When you feel familiar with its form, close your eyes. Picture the object exactly as it is, suspended in space before you. Hold the image there for a moment, then open your eyes again and compare what you see with what you remembered.

This simple oscillation between sight and memory strengthens attention and steadiness.

Now introduce a second object, a simple three-dimensional object this time. Observe the form it has, the color, texture and opacity. Now close your eyes. Let it reshape in front of your gaze with closed eyes as it is. Firstly as a two-dimensional, simple, and plain image. Now open your eyes and take your time to rest yourself and recalibrate your focused intentionality.

At the second phase of this particular exercise with the same object, now the focus will be on its authenticity . What makes this particular object unique? Are there any marks, cracks, or scratches on it? Take your time to memorise what you see. When you close your eyes again, let this new form appear in the same space.

The final part of this exercise will include a particular cyclical movement. When you give a brake, rest your focus and attention be prepared to work for a final time with the same object. The mind learns here to move between inner and outer worlds without losing coherence. Now return to the first object and start to rotate it rotating slowly, or give it a repetitive, cyclical movement which will disclose its three dimensionality to you when you look at it. Trace this motion with your hands. However temporarily bracket this movement by excluding the body's participation in the imagery. Then close your eyes again and continue to see the moving image in the mind. When you open your eyes, repeat the motion. Then try again, until you get better at it.

This sequence between seeing, imagining, and moving refines focus through embodied imagery. Once the movement feels stable, let the object dissolve.

The final part of the exercise will invite its participants to think on a larger scale.

In its part, start by imagining an empty room, more like a void, without any detail, colour or opening like an abstract architectural model resting in the void. There are no windows yet, no furniture, no texture, only the sense of volume. Stay here a while, inhabiting the simplicity of space itself. Gradually begin to add detail. Perhaps a faint light filters from above, or a surface gains a trace of texture. Allow colour to emerge softly, air to move, temperature to form. The room begins to breathe. Since you add the details, notice that it runs out of options, gets a more definitive size and scale, and becomes more concrete even in the imagination. Finally, when you decide everything, place yourself in it. Now you are within a room inside a void.

Now place yourself in the centre of this space. Sense your own presence standing there. Feel the floor beneath your feet, the air surrounding you. Take a slow step forward. Imagine walking, each step forming in silence. If you wish, mirror this by walking a few steps in real life, letting your body and the imagined space interact. Let it again be a cyclical movement, easy to remember and repeat. Continue for several rounds: walk, pause, turn, observe in your mind. As the room grows more alive, let more details appear: the sound of your steps, light shifting across a surface, the grain of a wall. The texture and quality of the air, the humidity, the temperature, the acoustics of the room. The space evolves from abstraction into lived environment. What was potential becomes presence[17].

When ready, let the image fade. Return to breathing. Notice what remains in the body, the trace of spaciousness, the subtle sense of having a place that lingers inside you. Focused intention lives in this residue, in the coherence between imagination, movement, and being.

Being attentive to such a practice necessitates readiness. It is natural that the attention oscillates, and within that rhythm, distraction arrives as part of the process. Mind is full of diverse things. When the mind wanders, we do not need to resist. We can welcome each interruption as a visitor, feel its texture, and stay with it long enough to understand its shape. Then, as it releases, we return to breath. This movement between attention and distraction becomes part of the same practice; an ebb and flow that mirrors the pulse of existence itself.

In this space of awareness, the therapist steps into a different kind of presence. The work turns from purely attending to accompanying, from interpreting to listening. The therapist's task is to hold a shape for what wishes to unfold while leaving room for discovery. The therapist embodies a different role, even only as they suggest something. In this case is facilitation. The therapist needs to keep in mind the subtle shift that this will bring into the dialogue. When the therapist lattunes to the clients embodied awareness, the intention shifts toward the embodied experience, without an aim or direction. This is a state where the shared presence invites awe and curiosity. Nietzsche once observed that what we do not intend to find often carries the deepest meaning. The same principle holds here: when we trust the body's quiet intelligence, a new scale within the palette of perception begins to emerge from the experience itself.

As presence steadies, focused intention starts to reverberate through every gesture. Breath, movement, and imagination weave together into one continuous act of being. From this place, awareness begins to emerge through openness. Stillness grows into expression, and expression moves toward relation. No-thing and form meet within one another, paving the way for a dynamic process: awareness steps out of the very ground that once contained it. What was practice becomes life, an intimate dialogue between freedom and limitation, between isolation and integration.

We need attention to create safety, to hold and transform what we are. With its help, we can learn to see ourselves more clearly, to translate the non-verbal message of the body that carries long forgotten meanings and frozen messages in time. These reflections invite us toward wider, multidimensional grounds of existence. The time zone where we dwell most often (whether it is past, present, or future) shapes our way of thinking. When we linger too long in the past (this is what involuntary movements and sensations function for: reflecting an unintegrated past), we lose contact with the horizon ahead. When we live entirely for the future, we overlook what already asks for our attendance. Existential therapy helps widen this horizon. It opens the perception of time so that life can be experienced as a continuity rather than a sequence of fragments. When awareness distributes itself more evenly across the dimensions of time, understood as non-linear, we gain a greater capacity to encounter the limitations that shape our temporal experience and to become creative in recognising the possibilities within them, allowing us to meet what life brings more fully.

Temporality, a third perspective and memory integration:

One way we become trapped in time is through urgency and aspiration. Disintegration has an accelerating affect. Inspiration offers another rhythm; it arises in reciprocity, in the presence of the other. Change unfolds continuously if we slow down to see what is being stuck, and how is it like being around that stuckness? The quality of time and events around it, what is significant, which quality is more prominent, how is it to be in that particular state? Change is

informed by the past and leaning toward what is yet to come. However it gives us autonomy only from the here and now. We can start our journey here and integrate our past, how we remember things, decide what kind of a world we would like to live in. Time moves non-linearly. However it is directional physically, binding, limiting and involuntarily in movement in itself circling through memory and anticipation. Memory serves as a thread that connects diverse versions of the self across time. The way we relate to time determines how we embody our living. Time can be a source of regret. Often we imagine that healing would be possible if only we had enough time, yet it is not the amount of time that transforms us but the way of how we conceptualise our perception. Change is always happening even if we do not acknowledge it, nevertheless it can only be fueled by awe and inspiration only if we can meet it with awareness. Each person's experience of the Umwelt in space and time is unique. The dialogue between self and environment alters with every encounter, every language, every city. In each setting, different parts of the self emerge. Our connection to place and time, our way of standing in transition, reveal who we are becoming.

Movement brings this notion of being towards time, into form. Before focusing on how the involuntary movement and sensations emerge in the therapeutic dialogue, the therapist might sense the readiness of the environment. The focus on embodiment is not for everyone. The ways of talking from an unacknowledged space is different and diverse for all of us in experiential level. It is through dreams with some people, puzzles and confusions in real life events, disturbances in relationships, and for some there might be a way through listening and focusing the non-verbal involuntary cues from the body. The question is whether the client feels curiosity, acceptance, and the will to explore further. When the moment feels right, embodied attitude becomes a way to speak without words. If a client says, "I feel tightness, a weight on my chest," the therapist might ask: what kind of energy is this, what is the quality of it, toward what direction does it travel, what is its colour or texture, how is the sense of it? These questions give form to what is felt- give a temporary certainty to something abstract and previously incomprehensible. As description deepens and becomes grounded in a sense of phenomenological dwelling, it may become possible to ask about the life beyond the body. What presses you in the world? What holds you down? Sometimes a even counter movement can be imagined—a gesture that restores balance, or an abstract contemplation opening new paths to new horizons. "What would change this weight, this colour, this direction?" In these small exchanges, imagination and body begin to converse.

The therapist might also reflect by showing that they notice the parallels between the feeling, sensing, narrative and the gesture, "I notice your shoulders rise when you mention your father." By quietly mirroring this gesture, the therapist can alternatively offer the client a chance to witness their own movement. Every observation then returns to the client through an open question: "What do you notice in this?" "How is it to embody this state right now? What is familiar and what is different?" The aim is always to restore authorship to the person's own sense-making and also to remind us that we live in a dynamic system. We create representations as it is releasing to see and narrow down a concept. But we often do not realise that even the associations or representations are not fixed. Also, in the work of embodiment, what we will find may not stick with us for long if we integrate what it has to say.

Integration requires witnessing. Verbalising body sense accompanies this process.

Begin by finding a comfortable position, sitting or standing. Let awareness travel slowly through the body. Choose one area that draws attention. Let this place become the focus of your meditation. Breathe into it. Observe the smallest discomfort and imagine you are looking

through a magnifying glass made of breath. Each inhale clarifies; each exhale softens. Ask quietly, what is the message that travelled through time to arrive here? Do not answer with the mind. Let the body speak in movement or warmth or image.

Another practice involves entering another perspective.

Begin by sensing yourself in the present moment: the air, the sound, the light, the temperature. Feel the chair, the ground, the support behind you. Then close your eyes and reimagine that you see yourself from a distance, as if standing across the room. Let this image shift. Create a possibility for the whole scenery to change. The scene fades into the blue of the sea. You find yourself on the ocean floor, luminous and still, moving gently with the current yet grounded. You recognise yourself as part of this life, like sea grass bending with the tide but rooted in the sand. Notice what it feels like to be in this way. Which sensations dissolve? Which sensations arise? Stay in this state until your breath softens, until the scene gains a slight familiarity. Feel the blue surrounding you, notice the qualities that expand your reality, especially the ones you feel less in your daily life but you feel now. Enjoy this experience, then when you feel ready, let it fade as you return to the room.

Something will have changed; the room is the same, but your way of being in it has altered.

Phenomenological inquiry opens the self to the embodied experience as a landscape of meaning. It invites what lacks words. Attention, when steady, becomes a tool for reduction: the bracketing so that phenomena can reveal themselves. Questions guide the way. The following questions are options to ask to verbalise the unspoken sensations in the body:

Where does my awareness gather most strongly? What kind of movement^[18] or stillness does it invite? How does this energy travel? What happens when I stop trying to name it? Which memories or beliefs appear? How does the mind intervene? What new language might describe this sensation? If it were a shape or an image, what would it be? What truth in the body has not yet been spoken? How familiar or foreign does it feel? When did I first meet something like this? How does my body relate to it now?

These questions are brackets; that invites the body to tell its story. Now let's merge the readiness for nothingness, creating an imaginary scenery and phenomenological perception for this final time-travelling practice:

Take a comfortable standing position, if necessary, get support from the wall, or sit on a comfortable chair. Do a body scan. Identify discomforts in the body. Focus on one chosen area that presents itself at this particular moment. This area will be the subject of meditation. Increase the awareness of your breath and be more attentive to catch the cues from the chosen body part. Notice the slightest discomfort. Imagine that you are looking at this sensory projection with a breath-powered magnifying glass. Take resilience from your breath and be prepared to feel more, as if you are magnifying the sensation. Try to remember a past time in which you have felt exactly the same sensory experience. Enter the scenery, and describe: What do you see around? What time of the year? Are you at open air or in a building, where are you? Who are you with? What was the memory about? Re-invite the feelings and emotions that you have embodied at the time being. Stay where you can and ask yourself: If there is a one-sentence mail from the past to the here and now, what is the unsaid message that travelled in time until today? Imagine that you are allowing your body to express this message through the body. Stay with the sensory experience and notice if you feel an urge for a movement: Yield, pull, push, reach or grasp. Yet stay with the urge and instead of getting into the action, notice the sensory experience in the stillness. What is it like to discover this

message now? Focus on your breaths and start minimising your magnifying glass, coming back to the moment and expansiveness of your body and if necessary, even expand your attention towards the room, the building, the neighbourhood, even to the city, and gradually come back to yourself. Breathe out slowly and release.

Every practice needs a closing moment, a return. The end of the session moves toward an attempt toward integration. In the beginning, questions help reveal difference. In closing, they begin to trace unity. The therapist may ask how sensations have shifted or how they now are more integrated. These questions can be directed, in other words, with an attitude that is more inclined towards hope. The session ends with a few quiet breaths, allowing awareness to soften and release. What has changed in the body begins to show itself later, in experience; in natural breath, gesture, posture, and presence, even the in the sense of time which in experience is physical. Subtle awareness leaves an imprint; the self begins to inhabit its own form with a slightly broadened perspective.

We can carry these experiences forward as part of our inquiry by experiencing them in diverse ways rather than solely facilitating and applying some techniques. The attitude is phenomenological, which means that it is not necessary to objectify the experience to narrow down the meaning. Attention steadies, time widens, and a dialogue emerges. Involuntary aspects of embodied presence also have something to do with defence mechanisms, so we may even experience how the quality of the dialogue has changed and can measure what the impact of this in-depth work is. Did it soften the relationality, or was it not phenomenological, fell into too much of a doing-ontology, and lost the track of the dialogue and new defences emerged? It is a delicate balance to keep and a matter of the willingness to maintain a purely phenomenological attitude. The rhythm that began with no-thing now moves outward. What once was solitary awareness opens toward encounter. The following chapter turns back to this meeting, the relational dimension of practice, where awareness finds its reflection in the eyes of another and where grace can begin to emerge in-betweenness.

The Dialogue In Between

Dialogue forms the atmosphere to breathe and relate in, for this inquiry. After exploring embodiment, nothingness, intention, temporality, and the practices that anchor awareness, we now enter the relational field where experiences are both reciprocal and reversible. Every therapeutic encounter is a meeting with the other and is shaped not only by what each person brings, but by what unfolds between them. If embodiment grounds experience, dialogue becomes the atmosphere that surrounds it, the living space where meaning is co-created. By the time you, the reader, arrive at this chapter, something subtle has already occurred. Reading is never a solitary act; it is an encounter. Your body has responded, perhaps through agreeing, accepting or tightening, disagreeing, or even with tension. Certain passages may have opened a sense of expansion, others may have unsettled or stirred. In this sense, a dialogue has already begun. My words have moved through your perceptual field, and your responses (which, having remained at an unexplored territory for me), have shaped the horizon of this exchange. This chapter brings that implicit facet of relationality into awareness, which is the most valid feature of this process.

Before dialogue can deepen, a specific, non-verbal kind of trust must be present. Fonagy's concept of epistemic trust describes the capacity to receive another's being in the world as safe, relevant, and personally meaningful. In psychotherapy, epistemic trust is the foundation

that allows implicit material that exists in the dialogue without a proper introduction or acknowledgement to emerge without fear of intrusion or misattunement out there in the world. The body already discloses before the language does. A micro-movement, a subtle collapse in posture, a shift in breath, a sudden drop in tone: these quiet revelations arise unbidden and often carry the traces of earlier relational fields, transported silently across time. For such disclosures to become meaningful rather than overwhelming, the relational space must remain honest, attuned, and uncluttered. Epistemic trust asks for transparency of intention, steadiness of presence, willingness and courage to confront whatever shift this disclosure brings and clarity of stance. It does not ask for unlimited possession of information in material form, but it demands a silent contract, which is a ground and a home for the dialogue.

The therapist witnesses without invading, acknowledges without interpreting prematurely or creating assumptions with an attitude that Emmy van Deurzen describes as unconditional positive regard, and creates the conditions in which the implicit is welcomed and can take shape at the client's own pace. When a therapist quietly reflects, "I notice your breath tightened as you said that," this is not decoding. It is an offering of language to experience—an invitation rather than a direction, and the therapist always responds back with a level of disclosure, pointing out the shared feelings or the validity of the experience. Embodied work heightens vulnerability. The therapist becomes a participant in a deeply intimate process, responsible for maintaining a field where implicit memory can unfold with dignity. This responsibility is ethical, relational, and experiential.

Martin Buber's relational philosophy deepens this understanding. An I–Thou encounter arises when two presences meet without reducing one another into objects, interpretations, categories, or roles. Buber describes this concept with mutuality. According to Buber, mutuality is a rare and profound mode of being, marked by presence, authenticity, and full encounter. Mutuality does not imply symmetry of responsibility; rather, it speaks to the originality and uniqueness of presence. It is, on the other hand, an impossible relationship that is worth an effortful will. In mutuality, there is a risk for abandoning the self for the sake of exploring another's world. It is an empathy problem. However, despite the inachievability of the task, the resoluteness of the attitude creates unconditional positive regard^[19] and can bring the ability to hold. Being understood is an ache in many people's hearts, and despite the limitation the attitude of understanding brings, one can remain phenomenological instead, accepting the fact that there is no real meeting in the sense of merging different worlds; however, there is a quality in the dialogue that is approaching it.

How we can physically and relationally observe mutuality is in the level of attunement in the dialogue. These micro-attunements create the conditions for truth to be spoken, reverse the uncanniness of the world to a relational home. The lived body becomes the medium of relation, and relationality itself acquires texture and depth. In therapy, the I–Thou relation is not an added layer but the ground upon which technique becomes meaningful. As Buber reminds us, all real living is meeting. It demands sincerity and a willingness to remain permeable without losing form.

Ludwig Binswanger carried Buber's insight into the clinical world. For Binswanger, struggles in life cannot be fully understood through intrapsychic structures alone; it must be understood in terms of how a person inhabits the world: in the *Mitwelt*, the shared relational environment. The therapeutic encounter becomes a small world of its own, with its own atmosphere, tone, and rhythm. The therapist's role is to meet this shared field with openness and clarity, while maintaining a structure and boundaries that protect the client's authorship of meaning. As

Binswanger(1946) suggested, the therapeutic relationship becomes a shared existential space in which new world-designs may begin to form, through co-existence which creates an authentic notion of space and time within the dialogue.

Ernesto Spinelli expands this perspective through what he calls the discipline of unknowing. Phenomenological practice requires the therapist to suspend the impulse to interpret, bracket assumptions, or work through ambiguity. Unknowing is a recycling process: a disciplined openness, a willingness to stay with uncertainty without rushing to closure. Meaning emerges from lived experience itself rather than being formed from external interpretation. Unknowing protects the dialogue from becoming a monologue of the repetition of rigid structures; it preserves the mystery and the possibility that is inherent in the relational field.

Every genuine encounter carries the risk of vulnerability, which is concealed in the Other, as a facticity of being affected by their presence in the mutuality. Intimacy in therapy is essential, a validation of hope for new world designs through exemplificary relational fields. It is the willingness to allow oneself to be affected while remaining grounded. Simone Weil deepens this dimension through her understanding of grace. Grace arrives when the will softens; it has a courageous side to it for accepting lack of power and control. So it arrives from a point of lack of impulse, not from a state of paralysis, but from a state of balance and regulation. Grace cannot be summoned, yet it can be permitted. It truly is a difficult task in a world which is highly manipulative by exploiting the needs of its inhabitants. Grace is the gift that arises when relational tension dissolves, and power plays diminish. It softens the gravity of existence without bypassing it. Weil reminds us that enduring the void[20] is what allows grace to enter. In therapeutic dialogue, experiencing the void, both participants must tolerate the uncomfortable experience of uncertainty long enough for something unexpected to emerge.

Within this article, there has been an ongoing search for an embodied freedom, one that does not deny the limits, constraints, or boundaries that shape a life. Freedom here is not imagined as escape from facticity but as the discovery of movement *within* it. This is where Weil and Sartre diverge in illuminating ways. Each engages with the void, yet they fill it differently. For Sartre[21], the void in the form of no-thing opens upon a field of possibilities which creates an unavoidable horizon of choice that “condemns” the for-itself to freedom. The emptiness between present and future becomes a space of projection, decision, and self-creation. For Weil, however, the void is not a stage for choice but a site of receptivity. Where Sartre sees possibility, Weil sees a clearing; an invitation for grace to enter when the will relinquishes its grasp. Sartre’s void demands action; Weil’s invites attention. Sartre’s freedom is active and burdened; Weil’s is spacious and ethically oriented. Although being apart in various ways, their discourses combined form the horizon of therapeutic dialogue. Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty echo this in their own ways: freedom as anxiety, as limit situation, as responsibility for the Other, as intercorporeal possibility. Each contributes a facet of the same truth: freedom becomes embodied in relational encounters. In all encounters, however, we return to the reality of being at a physical space, surrounded by things and also us to the body, for it is through posture, breath, sensation, and relational presence that these orientations toward the void are actually lived. There is a way within this article that seeks embodied freedom, despite the limitations life brings, constraints and boundaries. But as a felt sense, experience and perception, there is an exploration of a possibility. How does it land on you as the reader?

As this chapter comes to a close, I return to you, who has travelled through these movements with me. Reading is an embodied encounter. Something in your presence has shifted as you

moved through these ideas. Pause for a moment and notice: What stirred in you? What was overwhelming for you? What inspired? Where did you and I meet? This meeting is neither imaginary nor abstract; it is lived through the very medium of this article, which has centred: the embodied experience. Theory, metaphor, technique, and language have carried us here, creating a third space, an in-between. This dialogue does not end here; it prepares the way for the final movement, where freedom, embodiment, and grace will be drawn together in conclusion. For now, let the question linger gently: How has this encounter arrived at you, and in what way have you responded?

Conclusion:

The movement explored in this article has unfolded as a developing rhythm, like a pulse of a living being, rather than connoting a closed rotation which the concept of a triangle might have suggested. The effort was constructing a continual deepening of embodiment, releasement and return. This rhythm does not circle back upon itself mechanically; it expands, evolves, and transforms. Embodiment provides the grounding from which experience takes shape, and releasement loosens our “understandings” (in both physical forms, in selfhood, relationships, meaning and even collectively) through which perception tends to narrow, and the return that follows is never a repetition of an earlier state. It is a returning to one’s own ground, a movement of selfhood as lived, a recollecting of what Heidegger would call one’s ownmost possibilities (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Such a return is an act of reinhabiting the self, a slow, perceptive returning into oneself in which one’s situatedness becomes newly visible and newly inhabitable.

Embodiment grounds us in the immediacy of lived experience; releasement loosens habitual interpretations, softening the rigidities through which experience narrows; and return carries this expanded awareness back into life. Yet return, existentially, is never a simple repetition. It is not a return *to* what was, but a return *into* oneself in the manner of reinhabiting one’s own lived ground, a movement back toward one’s ownmost possibilities, hence a renewed capacity to inhabit one’s being with an expanded horizon. In Heidegger’s terms, it is a gesture of reclaiming one’s *eigene* (ownmost)existence (Heidegger, 1927/1962), a movement of coming back to oneself not as possession but as lived presence.

Each encounter with the world, each moment of sensing, loosening, and opening, shifts the horizon from which life is met again. In this way, the triangle functions less as a model and more as a *rhythmic architecture* for becoming, an embodied phenomenological unfolding in which meaning continually re-forms itself within constraint, possibility, and relation. Kierkegaard reminds us that freedom often first appears as anxiety, “the dizziness of possibility” (Kierkegaard, 1844/1980). Kierkegaard’s reflections on inwardness reveal how freedom first appears as a fragile, vulnerable, trembling probability, a moment in which the self feels its own depth opening beneath it (Kierkegaard, 1844/1980). Jaspers extends this sensibility by describing the way limit situations press existence into clarity and bring one back to the truth of one’s position in the world (Jaspers, 1956/1971). These existential insights illuminate the movement of the triangle: embodiment confronts facticity; releasement shifts one’s stance within it; return allows one to meet the world again through this updated perspective. Hence, the triangle is not only a conceptual frame but a lived gesture of becoming, eudamonia.

Throughout this inquiry, the lived body appeared in this dialogue as a forgotten feature of existential theory and regained validity as the medium of selfhood: the place where memory, experience, and possibility converge. Through embodied awareness, one learns to sense the subtle openings that life offers even within the weight of limitation. Releasement then becomes the transitional space where these openings can breathe. And the return that follows is never the same return as it was; it is the *updated capacity* to inhabit one's being with more coherence, spaciousness, and attuned responsibility.

This cannot happen without the consideration of the Other, with an openness, regarding the self and holding ourselves and the Other accountable as the witness. This is where Levinas, Weil, Buber and Binswanger stepped into the dialogue by reminding us that real living is meeting (Buber, 1970), opening up to the possibilities toward new world constructs (Binswanger, 1963), amidst all the fragility, vulnerability and powerlessness the openness to experience brings. One cannot release without connecting, expanding, distancing, relating and witnessing. The lived texture of the being became a plateau where remembrance and attunement (that grows each time one comes back to oneself with more presence) flourish in awareness and transformation. Consequently, the return that follows is enriched, for one re-enters life with greater clarity, perceptual openness, and responsibility. In this sense, freedom becomes neither abstract nor detached; it becomes perceptible in the smallest adjustments of breath, posture, and relational presence. These shifts suggest that even within constraint, a sense of possibility remains accessible, and such possibility is a form of experiential freedom which movement toward opening brings.

In closing, this exploration has looked upon a neglected facet of existential psychotherapy: the body. To sustain a phenomenological attitude toward a realm that already had been saturated with conceptualisation, where experience has long been translated into structure and symbol rather than having a verbal language, requires effortful will and resoluteness. It is not straightforward to approach embodiment through an existential-phenomenological lens; its nearness can feel narrowing, also ambiguous, even uncanny and perhaps this is why it has often been bypassed in favour of broader and conceptually more elaborate themes. Nevertheless, it remains essential to remember that the body is a prerequisite of living, unavoidable in its presence, and a representational testimony to our being as it moves through the world within the texture of space-time. For this reason, I chose a grounding conceptualisation (a reverse triangle) to illuminate an aspect of existence that frequently remains behind the scenes. If this vista, integrating multiple existential and phenomenological currents, offers even a slight widening of perception or evokes new possibilities for thinking about embodied experience within existential psychotherapy, then it has served its purpose of creating new possibilities to look at our lived experience with fresh eyes.

The therapeutic function of embodiment is reminding someone of the tone of their aliveness. It is not only the body, but the whole material surroundings that shape our sensory world. It is the breeze, the smell, our relationship with money, our experience of joy and passion; it is what we rest our eyes upon in the distance, the sounds that reach us, the art we connect to, the neighbourhood that becomes our ground, the texture of the city from which we rise. It is the sensed imprint that returns to us when we pause, the meaning gathered from the sum of our days. Perhaps it is also the music that lingers at the end, the final palette of colours that echo from us the aftertaste of a life sensed from within.

[1] The term *focusing* originates with Eugene Gendlin, who described it as a method of attending to the implicitly sensed meaning carried in the body (Gendlin, 1981). The broader concept of intentionality derives from Husserl's phenomenology, where consciousness is always directed toward something (Husserl, 1913/1982). Merleau Ponty deepened this understanding by grounding intentionality in the lived body and in perceptual engagement with the world (Merleau Ponty, 1962). Heidegger reframed intentional directedness as the world disclosing activity of Dasein within its situated existence (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Later existential thinkers extended these ideas in different directions: Rollo May emphasized the creative and expressive dimensions of intentionality (May, 1983), while Levinas underscored an ethical encounter (which includes the other and assigns responsibility to it) that exceeds what intentional consciousness can contain or fully hold (Levinas, 1961/1969).

[2] "The look is the apprehension of myself as seen." Sartre (1943/ 2003, pp. 252-302)

[3] Heidegger (1962/ 1927) describes *Sorge* as the fundamental structure of being with others (*Mitsein*); an authentic attentiveness toward another, already carries a dimension of responsibility

[4] The existential structure of experience is often described through the intervening of interwoven worlds (*Umwelt*, *Mitwelt*, *Eigenwelt*) an approach developed by Binswanger (1963) and later expanded (with the addition of *Überwelt*) by Van Deurzen (2010) and Arnold-Baker (2023). These horizons reflect the physical, relational, personal, and transcendent dimensions of existence. As this article looks upon the embodied experience which emerges through dialogue, in contact with different existential dimensions, I will suggest an expansion by offering different artworks which I believe do convey the sense of diversity among these realms. The artworks associated with these worlds, Klimt's *The Kiss* (1907–1908), Matisse's *La Danse* (1910), Maier's reflective self-portraits (c. 1954–1970), and Grey's *Theologue* (1984), serve as aesthetic parallels that illuminate how these existential dimensions become perceptible through the embodied, relational, and meaning-oriented textures of lived experience.

[5] I want to draw attention to the contrast in between Levinas's "relational openness and vulnerability" and Anzieu's "wounded, layered and fractured Skin Ego".

[6] Wallin (2007) describes how the therapeutic relationship offers an opportunity to revise the concept of attachment through what he terms the "earned secure attachment." In phenomenological practice, this learning is also traceable in subtle embodied shifts. The therapist's posture, pacing, voice, and ability to attune to somatic cues all contribute to creating a felt sense of safety. Polyvagal theory (Porges, 2011) expands upon this by identifying the ventral vagal pathway as crucial for social engagement and physiological safety. In other words if we are equipped and ready by having trained our nervous systems to switch back to Ventral Vagal states, no matter where we have started from, we could have possibly utilized

our embodied self as an anchor for regulation. If clients have given the opportunity to witness the therapist's authentic presence as a regulated self—softened eyes, soothing prosody, relaxed gestures—their own nervous systems can find the possibility to down-regulate. This process is non-verbal, but deeply embodied, occurring within the relational field as it is simultaneously being reflected to all existential dimensions.

[7] As part of the framework from Ernesto Spinelli's conceptualisation (2005).

[8] James Bugenthal (1987), a key figure in existential-humanistic psychotherapy, warned that increasing bodily awareness is not inherently benign. In fact, it can become a source of anxiety, create a situation that requires coping skills and bring a sense of urgency rather than creating an atmosphere that is open for exploration. For clients unfamiliar or uncomfortable with embodied self-reflection, who do not feel safe and resilient enough, attending to physical sensations may amplify distress.

[9] In di David's (c. 1580–1590) representation of Marsyas which is depictive in a literary manner (depicting a mythical narrative) and Schiele (1912) where he portrays the exposed and contorted body in a fractured, wounded presence, by delivering an embodied feeling even though we cannot directly see any explicit story. In both, we receive a message from *eidōs*.

[10] Husserl's ideas about the body are at odds with his Cartesian starting point. Descartes situates the body on the mundane side of mind-world duality. To him, it is not a part of thinking nor is essential to the consciousness. On the contrary the positionality of the body is always subjected to suspicion. However, Husserl developed this conception by reinterpreting the situatedness of the body as a living subject, in the world with others (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011).

[11] "To be conscious is always to be conscious of the world, and the world and body are always present to my consciousness although in different ways. But this total consciousness of the world is consciousness of the world as ground for a particular this; thus just as consciousness specifies itself in its very act of nihilation, there is the presence of a particular structure of the body on the total ground of corporeality. When I am in the process of reading, I do not cease to be a body seated in a particular arm chair three yards from the window under given conditions of pressure and temperature. And I do not cease to exist this pain in my left index finger any more than I cease to exist my body in general. However I exist the pain in such a way that it disappears in the ground of corporeality as a structure subordinated to the corporal totality. The pain is neither absent nor unconscious; it simply forms a part of that distance-less existence of positional consciousness for itself. If a little later I turn the pages of the book, the pain in my finger, without becoming thereby an object of knowledge, will pass to the rank of existed contingency as a figure on a new organization of my body as the total ground of contingency" (Sartre, 1943, pp. 334-335).

[12] The implicit or repressed side of human experience has been reinterpreted in various ways by existential thinkers. Camus reminds us that there is no shadow without the light, insisting that it is essential to know the night as much as the day (1991/1942). Rollo May later introduces the concept of the *daimonic* (1973), drawing on the classical Greek understanding of a unified life force capable of potentiating both creativity and destruction. His formulation parallels Jung's notion of archetypal potency, in which the same notion can split into both constructive and destructive expressions. Building on this tradition, Diamond expands the daimonic into the realm of embodied and sensory phenomena, suggesting that even unexplainable somatic experiences may be manifestations of daimonic material. As Hoffmann

(2004) observes, cultural repression plays a central role in shaping how the daimonic emerges. In the Victorian era, when Freud was developing psychoanalysis, sexuality had become a dominant site of repression and social fixation. Freud's theory was therefore a logical response to the cultural conditions of his time, though he understood only later that sexuality represented just one facet of the broader daimonic, despite never using the term himself.

Becker (1973) later argued that death had become the modern locus of repression; May continued this trajectory by identifying anxiety (and subsequently anger and other emotions) as additional daimonic expressions shaped by culture. Diamond pushes this further, proposing that anger itself has become the new cultural fixation. These cultural fixations, once repressed, inevitably return in the form of psychological symptoms and wider social pathologies. This raises a central question: how do such fundamental mechanisms become repressed in the first place? Heidegger speaks of *forgetfulness* (1977/1949–1954): a mode of being in which parts of ourselves become concealed, shadowed, or rendered inaccessible. Yet even these shadowed aspects retain their function, if not their purpose. Everything that is pushed into the dark continues to act upon us, whether acknowledged or not.

[13] The term “no-thing” is used here in an experiential and phenomenological sense, rather than as a metaphysical claim. While the meditative softening described in this chapter may evoke aspects of Buddhist sunyata, Simone Weil's understanding of the void, or Sartre's account of nothingness, these traditions refer to distinct philosophical horizons. The present usage points to a lived thinning of habitual meaning and a widening of perceptual openness, without equating or reducing the differences between these conceptual frameworks.

[14] This also evokes the concept of “experienced distance” being a type of free space we normally feel around us that provides the amplitude of life or vitality (Minkowski, 1933).

[15] An unorthodox artistic example about how releasement can look like in the embodied experience: Refik Anadol's sensory transformations (Anadol, 2018) offer a visual analogue to this loosening, dissolving stable forms into fluid fields of color and motion. His work illustrates how perception can open into a wider horizon when habitual structures are temporarily suspended.

[16] Imagine a dialogue in which attention and relationality begin to thin out. If the speed of the exchange overwhelms the space between speaker and listener, slowing the dialogue can create a spaciousness where the unseen impulse behind that acceleration may reveal itself.

[17] This exercise was first presented as part of the workshop “*Liberated Body: Body as an Anchor for Meaning and Regulation*” at the European Conference of Existential Therapy, Rome, 2025. Its inspiration draws from a reference to the city where this practice was implemented to a workshop presentation. Partly the reference for the imaginative exercise comes from Ancient Roman practices of rhetorical and spatial memory, particularly *the method of loci*. Orators in Rome often used architectural and sensory cues as a tool to memorise speeches that are hard to remember, attaching paragraphs and sentences to the sequence of monuments, the odours of incense or pyres, and the resonance of crowds—to construct *mnemonic architecture*, assigning each section of a speech to a distinct sensory landmark. This method can also be used today as a contemplative practice. The following exercise is the interpretation that I have used while facilitating the workshop: Take a comfortable seat and observe the room as if seeing it for the first time, with softened eyes, free from judgment. Focus on one object at a time (like chair, door, lamp, second door, and going back towards

the end to beginning and continue as a cycle), resting attention before gently shifting to the next, forming a path for your gaze. Repeat the sequence several times, noticing how perception itself changes what is seen. For a deeper variation, prepare a walking path (perhaps in a park) and carry the same practice into motion, allowing each landmark to serve as an anchor for awareness and presence.

[18] A simple language for this inquiry could have been provided by utilising six simple movements (yield, push, reach, grasp, pull, release), psychoeducating the client and encouraging them to identify which movement is closer to the feeling. For detail please visit Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (1993 and 2018) and Ruella Frank (2001 and 2015).

[19] Van Deurzen (2002) emphasises that existential therapy does not revolve around unconditional acceptance but rests instead on an honest and authentic encounter in which the client is encouraged to explore their lived reality.

[20] Like a la grange point (a gravitational balance point) in space

[21] "For-itself can never be its Future except problematically, for it is separated from it by a Nothingness which it is. In short the For-itself is free, and its Freedom is to itself its own limit. To be free is to be condemned to be free. Thus the Future qua Future does not have to be. It is not in itself, and neither is it in the mode of being of the For-itself since it is the meaning of the For-itself. The Future is not, it is possibilized. " (Sartre, 1943, pp. 129).

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