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Lund, Sweden, March 5, 2017.

Dear reader,

This is the final revised version of an article which discusses Eugene Gendlin's notion of "the felt sense," with applications to international politics. This is the abstract:

Despite whatever academics say, international politics is *not* an intellectual enterprise and to intellectualize it is to misunderstand it. Instead international politics, at its most basic level, is a matter of how we, and the collectivities we have created for ourselves, find ourselves in the world. Finding ourselves in the world is first and foremost a task which our bodies solve. Eugene Gendlin's phenomenological psychology, and his focus on the "felt sense," provide ways of investigating the embodied nature of international politics. No one has so far analyzed international politics the way Gendlin's psychology makes possible. The prospects are exciting.

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As always, I'm very grateful for comments: erik@ringmar.net.

Thanks for reading.

Erik

Eugene Gendlin and the Feel of International Politics

Erik Ringmar, Lund University

Abstract: Despite whatever academics say, international politics is not an intellectual enterprise and to intellectualize it is to misunderstand it. Instead international politics, at its most basic level, is a matter of how we, and the collectivities we have created for ourselves, find ourselves in the world. Finding ourselves in the world is first and foremost a task which our bodies solve. Eugene Gendlin's phenomenological psychology, and his focus on the "felt sense," provide ways of investigating the embodied nature of international politics. No one has so far analyzed international politics the way Gendlin's psychology makes possible. The prospects are exciting.

The social sciences have always had an anti-emotional bias.¹ Emotions have been regarded as aberrations and as unfortunate deviations from a rationalistic norm; emotions are what women have, lower-class people or foreigners. Yet as we now know, everything we do is couched in terms of affect. Emotions are not an afterthought or an add-on but they are there right from the start, coloring everything we do, setting the parameters for what we remember and plan, making each situation into a situation of a specific kind. Emotions tell us what things are and what they mean. International politics provides plenty of examples. People express love for their fatherlands, hate of their enemies, fear during wars, terror in the face of terrorist attacks and anxiety about the consequences of globalization. Take

¹ Thanks to Ross Crisp, Artie Egendorf and to the editors for comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

away the emotions and there will be little international politics left.(Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008, pp. 115–135; Crawford, 2000, pp. 116–156; Fierke, 2014; Hutchison & Bleiker, 2014, pp. 491–514)

However, acknowledging the importance of emotions is only the first step. We also have to say what emotions are and how they can be studied. We need theories and we need a methodology. Yet the vocabulary of affect is hopelessly confused. “Emotions” are often used interchangeably with “feelings” and with “moods” and there is little consensus among psychologists, physiologists, brain scientists and philosophers regarding what these terms refer to. The social scientists who have weighed in on the subject have added to the confusion by intimating that emotions are nothing but “social constructions.” That culture has an influence on emotions is certain but we know that they have a biological basis too. Emotions concern our bodies at least as much as our minds. Indeed, emotions are lodged in our bodies before they are registered by our minds and this is the very reason why they come to determine the perimeters for what we regard as the meaningful. At long last, yet so far with some trepidation, students of international politics are reaching the same conclusions.(Brown, 2013, pp. 435–454; Neumann, 2014, pp. 330–350; Ringmar, 2016, pp. 101–125)

Phenomenology provides a specific way of investigating emotions and psychologists of a phenomenological bent address a range of conditions that involve affective states. (Giorgi, 1970; Jager, 1989, pp. 217–231; Wertz, 2009, pp. 394–411) Emotions, to a phenomenologist, have their origin in the body and not in the mind; or rather, they originate in the interaction between our bodies and the situations in which they find themselves.(Johnstone, 2012, pp. 179–200; Cf. Ringmar, 2017a) It follows that emotions only can be defined as an aspect of a person's experience of a certain environment. Indeed, emotions are not “things” and psychology is not about “the mental,” since no

distinction can be made between the thinking subject and the objective world. Such a wholistic perspective, phenomenological psychologists will tell us, avoids many of the riddles — including the mythology of an “unconscious” — which traditional psychology has created. In terms of research methods, phenomenological psychology emphasizes precognitive, embodied, experiences — emotions arise as phenomena in our experience of being in the world.

One prominent example of a phenomenological psychologist is Eugene T. Gendlin. Born in Vienna in 1926, Gendlin received a PhD in philosophy from the University of Chicago in 1958, but he also worked closely with Carl Rogers, one of the founding fathers of American psychotherapy.(Cf. Gendlin, 1988, pp. 127–128; Ikemi, 2005, pp. 31–42) Gendlin taught in both the departments of philosophy and psychology at Chicago until his retirement in 1995, but he also maintained a psychotherapy practice on the side. To the general public he is best known as the person behind “Focusing,” a program with distinct New Age overtones which currently is relied on by thousands of dedicated practitioners around the world.² The purpose of this chapter is to briefly introduce Gendlin's work and to show how it might help us think about the role of emotions in social life in general and in international politics in particular. What we will try to do is to put the actors of international politics on Gendlin's couch and to make them talk about their emotions, following his phenomenological method.

1. Gendlin on the felt sense

Gendlin's phenomenology of affect is organized around a sharp distinction between feelings and emotions. Feelings concern how things feel. We feel things with our five

2 (Gendlin, 2001, As presented in popular titles such as 2003b; See further “The International Focusing Institute,” n.d.; Gendlin was an occasional lecturer at the Ensalen Institute in Big Sur, California, a leading center for the New Age movement. A personal account is Weisel-Barth, 2008, p. 386)

senses to be sure but in addition we have a generalized feeling for the whole of the situation in which we find ourselves. Gendlin calls this the “felt sense.” The felt sense is not a result of an interpretation and it does not require conscious ratiocination. Instead a felt sense is automatically and imperceptively arrived at, and it is our bodies rather than our minds that are in charge. Think of it as “[a] bodily awareness of a situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time.” Or “[t]hink of it as a taste, if you like, or a great musical chord that makes you feel a powerful impact, a big round unclear feeling.”(Gendlin, 2003b, p. 32) In a lecture Gendlin provides an example.(d’Orsogna, 2000) As a student at the University of Chicago he participated in a study which asked questions about the impact that therapists have on their clients. The assumption was that this impact was strong, but preciously little evidence of the effects could be found using traditional survey methods. Then Gendlin thought about his own experiences as a client and remembered what took place as he was about to enter the room of his therapist. Standing outside the door, hesitant to knock, he gathered himself, prepared himself, set himself in a certain frame of mind. This, he came to realize, was where it all was happening. It was in this felt sense that the terms of the subsequent interaction between the therapist and the client were laid out.

It seems difficult to explain, Gendlin admits, but somehow or another our bodies are able to make sense of situations without directly involving our conscious minds. There are a number of mechanisms at work here.(Gendlin, 1991, pp. 15–29) Most obviously, our bodies are designed for interacting with their environment, and information about the environment is for that reason implicit already in our body's structure. From the bone of a prehistoric animal one can infer not only the whole of its body, but also the whole of its environment, and what its body did in this environment. Our hands and feet are not only body-parts but they have implications, as it were; there are things that they want to do. In

addition there are entire repertoires of largely instinctive behavior associated with basic activities such as feeding, sleeping, mating and child-rearing.(Gendlin, 1991, p. 16) On top of these instinctive routines, there are habitual routines. In the course of our lives our bodies develop ever better ways of coping with any number of standardized situations. Since our bodies are in charge we do not have to explicitly think about how to walk up stairs, open doors and throw balls. And when unexpected situations occasionally come up, our habits can usually be adapted to fit the new circumstances.(Gallagher, 1986, pp. 541–554; Noë, 2009, pp. 97–128) Put an ant on an oily surface and you will see instincts adapting themselves.

Recent work in neuroscience adds another mechanism. As the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio argues, everything that happens to us throughout our lives is given an emotional weight, a certain feeling tone. Damasio refers to these weights as “somatic markers.”(Damasio, 1994, pp. 165–201) When we recall something, what we retrieve are not only the images associated with the event in question but also the feeling tones. Compare Marcel Proust eating his madeleines. Suddenly the spongy texture of a shell-shaped bun, together with a newly pressed sailor-suit, the dangling of tiny legs, the smell of coffee — combine to recreate the memory of a visit to a fashionable café as a child in the last century. Yet the memory not only *is* a certain way, it *feels* a certain way. Such madeleine effects, we can argue, are not necessarily the properties of individuals but can be shared by many individuals, even by societies at large. A culture contains all the associations that people in a society connect with a certain object, creature, place or situation; everything we ever read or heard said about an item; all the lore and the history; what we have seen in movies, newspapers and in nightmares.(Gendlin, 1991, p. 16) All of these associations too are stored away in the recesses of our minds, and although much of it is cognitive material, it too is labeled by means of somatic markers.

The result is that our bodies are far more knowledgeable than we are; or, better put, that we consist of far more than our conscious minds. Gendlin refers to this as an "excess." (Gendlin, 2004, pp. 127–151, 2009, pp. 147–161) There is an excess of embodied meanings which we usually never make explicit. No matter how long we talk, or how fancy the metaphors we employ, the felt sense will not be exhausted. Somehow or another, words are simply the wrong medium for conveying feelings. (Gendlin, 1992a, p. 344, 2003a, pp. 100–115) To some, this unsaid and unsayable surplus may be understood as a spiritual realm, and for Freudians it is the realm of the unconscious, but for Gendlin it is simply the inevitable consequence of the fact that we have bodies that have lived and are alive. (Gendlin, 1978, p. 10) And yet, we still need words. After all, it is only with the help of words that we can talk about things. Psychological theories, drawn from any of the different schools that exist, provide an example. Psychologists like to talk and, Gendlin implies, they often talk too much. While psychological theorizing is necessary, it leaves next to everything unsaid. "Feeling without further symbolization are blind, (and symbols alone are empty)." (Gendlin, 1978, p. 23)

The felt sense has a large number of implications, creating networks of entailments that spread far and wide. "A body isn't only an *is*; it is an *is and implies further*." (Gendlin, 1992b, p. 203; Gendlin in Heuman, 2011, p. 107) To feel hungry implies eating, and eating implies food, digestion and defecation; food, in turn, implies shopping and food preparation; food preparation implies kitchens, refrigerators and stoves ... and so on *ad infinitum*. (Gendlin, 1973, pp. 371–372) In much the same way our habits are stored in our bodies as sequences of actions which all imply each other. (Cf. James, 1890, pp. 114–115) Thus if we start to do one thing we will quite automatically go on to do the next. Some of these sequences can be very elaborate indeed — as when a violinist learns how to play an entire concerto by heart. Feeling tones too imply each other. It is through the felt sense

that things are associated in our minds, and the memory of one thing quite automatically triggers another.

By exploring these implications, a whole world can be deduced. But this is never a question of merely applying a set of preexisting rules. Instead, as we follow the implications of the felt sense, new and unexpected implications will come into view. “Our bodies can total up years of all kinds of experience, and at any moment give us something new, a new more intricate step.”(Gendlin, 1992b, p. 206) Imagine, for example, that you are an artist working on a painting or a poet writing a poem.(Gendlin, 1992a, p. 348) The work is not yet complete, something is missing. You add something but you realize right away that it is not quite what you were looking for.(Gendlin, 1992b, pp. 198–201) It does not feel right. So you try again, making new additions, until you are satisfied. When all the necessary implications have been deduced, and they all feel right, the painting or the poem is finished. Throughout this creative process it is the felt sense which guides us. The felt sense is carrying us forward and allowing us to say something new.

This, Gendlin explains, is essentially a metaphorical process.(Gendlin, 1995, pp. 1–2; Cf. Johnson, 1997) In a metaphor two systems of implications are suddenly, and perhaps unexpectedly, brought together. Metaphors are always literally false — a relationship, for example, is not really “at a crossroad” or “off the rails” — and yet we make sense of such language by letting the felt sense which we associate with relationships interact with the felt sense which we associate with journeys. By creatively exploring the connections between these two systems of implications, we come up with new ways of talking, but also with new ways of feeling. It is as though we had discovered a new world. Alternatively, we can explore the metaphors we take for granted, looking for unexpected implications. In this way, the felt sense can provide opportunities for criticism and political dissent.(Levin, 1994, p. 350; Cf. Ringmar, 2007, pp. 188, 203–207)

This is how Gendlin's discussion of the felt sense takes him to a philosophy of language.(Levin, 1997) The felt sense and language are closely related, he says, since language is based in the body. It is not that we make up words which we apply to the world but instead language is inherent in the world and as we explore the implications of the felt sense this language is gradually revealing itself.(Gendlin, 1978, p. 9) The body is the conduit of language, as it were. The implications demand to be spoken much as our hands and our feet demand to be used in a particular fashion. And what demands to be spoken, demands to be first verbalized and the listened to.(Cf. Hatab, 1994, p. 368; Johnson, 2008, pp. 86–110; Rosen, 2000) Many of these verbalizations may be obscure, and they may sound funny, and many people will not understand them, but, says Gendlin, since they clearly are related to existing ways of speaking, we will not misunderstand them either. When prompted by the quizzical looks of our interlocutors, we get a chance to say more. (Gendlin in Heuman, 2011, p. 109)

2. On the therapist's couch: feelings

Eugene Gendlin is not only a philosopher but also a practicing psychotherapist. He is not only interested in what feelings are and how they work, but he wants to help people deal with the problems that their feelings may cause. Often we simply do not understand ourselves and our reactions; we have problems dealing with situations and with other people; we get stressed out for no reason, or anxious or depressed. What we need to do in these situations, Gendlin suggests, is to explore the felt sense. It is in the felt sense that all of our cognitive activities arise — our emotions, our reflections, plans, hopes and fears. (Gendlin, 1992a, p. 347; Cf. Stanghellini & Rosfort, 2013, pp. 3–8) For this reason, it is here that the solutions to our psychological problems can be found. Somehow or another the felt sense must be accessed and once accessed it must be rearranged.

Gendlin is well aware of the difficulties we run up against here. A felt sense is not the kind of thing which we explicitly can study or even pay direct attention to. In fact, a felt sense is not a thing. "People rarely have a felt sense," Gendlin admits.

We usually act and speak sentiently, but without stopping to let that sentience come to us as a datum of inner attention. We attend to the people, and the things. Inwardly there are emotions, thoughts, images and memories, usually not a felt sense.(Gendlin, 1991, p. 16)

A felt sense is a medium, we might say, not a content. As such it allows our emotions, reactions, perceptions and thoughts to arise, but it is itself opaque. Much as the eye, the felt sense allows us to see but it cannot itself be seen. Yet we are not completely at a loss. There are techniques we can rely on, and the principal technique which Gendlin advocates he calls "focusing."(Friedman, 2003, pp. 31–42; Gendlin, 1991, p. 16; Heuman, 2011)

What you focus on above all is how you are feeling; that is, how your body finds itself in the world.(Gendlin, 1978, p. 2) Yet the question "how do you feel?" is itself quite vague and it is not always clear how to answer. But if we go to our bodies, Gendlin suggests, there is bound to be something there, something worth exploring, however murky and indistinct. The body knows the whole of each situation, in far greater detail than our minds, and this embodied knowledge will present itself to us as long as we remain patient. (Gendlin, 2003b, pp. vii–viii) Focusing is the method by which we gradually come to clarify this feeling and learn to follow its implications.

For example, if you feel some excitement or some opposition or some discomfort, go to the quality. The first thing you get on this felt sense is just a quality, and you won't even know what to call it. You have to say It's "ugh" or it's uncomfortable, or it's "something important is happening in here and I don't know what, but I can feel it."(Heuman, 2011, p. 106)

Gendlin presents us with a focusing manual in six steps.(Gendlin, 2003b, pp. 51–64) First we need to clear a space where we can sit quietly and return to our bodies. Next we try to get in touch with the felt sense, waiting for it even if it takes time to appear. Then we look

for what Gendlin refers to as a “handle” — a word or image which resonates perfectly with what the body tells us — perhaps something like “tight,” “sticky,” “scary,” “stuck,” “heavy,” “jumpy.” Next we test the accuracy of the handle by asking questions. Eventually the felt sense will stir and from this stirring answers will begin to appear. (Gendlin in Heuman, 2011, p. 45) “Is this what the feeling is like?” asks the therapists. “No,” says the client, “that is not quite it. What I meant to say is ...” “I see,” says the therapist, “but there might also be this and that, no?” “Yes,” the client will acknowledge, “but you have to take into consideration that ...” Prodded by the analyst in this fashion, the felt sense starts to speak, often in unexpected metaphors. Drawing one implication after another, we learn more and more, and all the while the client checks each step and statement against the felt sense. Eventually, with some luck, the client will experience a feeling of having arrived at a stopping point. The body shifts, it feels differently. The client exhales and says “OK, now I get it ...”

At the same time Gendlin is careful not to present focusing as a full-fledged therapy. Instead it is best practiced together with other techniques.(Gendlin, 1978, pp. 20–21) Actually, he suggests, it is through a process of focusing that all clients are helped regardless of whichever therapy they follow. Focusing helps since it allows us to lift a problem out of its old context and insert it into a new one. We put an issue in a place where it no longer hurts, where it no longer makes trouble for us or forces us to react in a strange and disruptive manner. Mere understanding is never going to be enough here; it is not enough to simply expose the problem and to put it into words. We must rebel against the dictatorship of cognition. In order to feel better we need to feel differently. We must learn to explore new and unexpected implications, break old patterns of thought and acquire new habits. This is not a quick fix to be sure but the consequences are self transforming. The self is transformed since its body feels different.

3. On the therapist's couch: emotions

Let us think about emotions next. Emotions too, Gendlin explains, are a matter of feelings, but at the same time emotions feel quite differently than a felt sense. A felt sense, we said, is diffuse, vague and difficult to put into words, but emotions are only too obvious, not least since many of them take the form of visible physiological changes. Emotions make our hearts beat, our knees tremble, and they give us stomach cramps. Emotions are also far more focused, far narrower, than the felt sense. While the felt sense is broad and in the background, emotions make us zero in on specific details, blinding us to everything else. When we are emoting, we know it, and others do too since emotions are in your face and in the face of others.

Compare how animals react. Whether animals can be said to have emotions is debated but cats that fight certainly seem to be angry and cats that purr seem to be content. And yet, as far as we know, emotions in animals concern only a “readiness potential,” a readiness, that is, to act in a certain fashion.(Panksepp & Watt, 2011, pp. 387–396) What a human would call “anger” is thus an animal's readiness to fight and what a human would call “fear” is an animal's readiness to flee. Human beings are animals too of course, and our emotions too have a readiness potential. For example: if we suddenly come upon a bear in the forest we might quite automatically take flight.(James, 1994, pp. 205–210; Lange, 1922, pp. 33–92) We react instantaneously and before we have had time to think about the matter, and it is only later, once we already are running, that we get scared. It is easy to see why such physiological immediacy has been favored by biological evolution.

When animals emote — if that is what they do — they always display the same, more or less identical, behavioral patterns, and the same can be said for humans too as long as we are talking about emotions understood as readiness potential.(Gendlin, 1973,

pp. 370–371) As most authors on the subject make clear, there is only a relatively small set of basic emotions. Although the list varies somewhat, the most commonly mentioned emotions are anger, fear, disgust, contempt, triumph, joy, sadness, jealousy, surprise and awe.(Ekman, 1992, pp. 169–200; Russell, 1991, pp. 426–450) These basic emotions are expressed in a standardized set of behaviors, and the behavior we find in humans is in fact not that different from the behavior of animals. Thus anger results in tense muscles, quickened breath and contorted facial muscles, and sadness implies tears, listlessness, downcast eyes, and so on.(Gendlin, 1973, p. 374) It is because the physical manifestations are standardized in this way that we can recognize emotions as the same from one person to the next, or across disparate contexts and cultures.

But — and this is crucial — in addition to these physiological changes, human beings represent emotions to themselves.(Gendlin, 1973, p. 384; Cf. Lewis & Todd, 2005, pp. 210–235) This is not something that animals do and the representation is what turns the readiness potential into an emotion properly speaking. We represent the emotion by imagining scenarios for ourselves.(Gendlin, 1973, pp. 373–377) The scenario describes ourselves, who we are and what we want, which situation we are in, the people with whom we interact and what our relations to them are. This scenario may apply to a situation which is right before us, but it can also apply to a situation as remembered or as anticipated. We find ourselves not in a certain situation as much as in our representation of a certain situation, and it is in relation to this representation that we react. As a result, we are often in a position to repress our emotions or to express them in some alternative manner.(Gendlin, 1973, pp. 375–377) We can also experience the emotion apart from the situation, and whenever we imagine the scenario, we are likely to experience the emotion again. These representations, says Gendlin, are constructed by means of the felt sense and they draw on its various implications.(Gendlin, 1978, p. 10; Heuman, 2011, p. 45) People

will represent things differently in their minds depending on their personal experiences but also depending on the society in which they live. As a result, although the readiness potential is expressed in much the same fashion across contexts and societies, emotions are expressed in culturally distinct ways and also differently from one person to the other. (Gendlin, 1973, pp. 379–380) As a result emotions come to feel quite differently too.

Our emotional reactions, or a lack thereof, are an important reason why we might seek the help of a psychotherapist. We react unpredictably and uncontrollably; we get angry, scared, anxious or sad for no reason or for reasons which we cannot quite understand. We seek professional help since we want to stop the emotional reactions from hurting us and from hurting others. This is where focusing comes in. It is by trying to uncover the felt sense that we can hope to understand why we imagine a certain scenario in a certain fashion. Focusing helps us lift out the emotion, as it were, and place it in a new context where it feels quite differently. Or perhaps focusing can help us create more robust routines that do not break down so easily and thereby never cause the emotion to arise in the first place.(Gendlin, 1992b, p. 204) “Your body knows the direction of healing and life. If you take the time to listen to it through focusing, it will give you the steps in the right direction.”(Gendlin, 2003b, p. 78)

4. The feel of international politics

International politics is next to always analyzed in rationalistic terms. It is discussed as a matter of the preferences, intentions and goals that guide policy-makers, or in terms of their interests, national or otherwise. Digging deeper, a student of international politics might ask about the perceptions of a politician, or her basic outlook on life, her *Weltanschauungen*, cognitive maps, or perhaps the psychological processes by means of which she perceives the world. Or we ask questions about identities and struggles for

recognition. Digging deeper still, we might investigate matters of psychological make-up: what particular politicians thought of their mothers, or what role emotions play in their lives. Yet none of this would be a primary concern of Eugene Gendlin's. To him, such cognitive and emotional material, interesting though it may be in its own terms, is derivative of a felt sense. The felt sense comes first and everything else comes second. Thus if we want to understand international politics it is the felt sense we should investigate. No one has properly looked at this before or analyzed it in anything approaching the manner which Gendlin suggests. The prospects are exciting.

So let us imagine putting political actors on Gendlin's couch. How do they feel? How do they find themselves in the world? What is that murky, indistinct, sensation in the pit of their stomachs? Asking these questions we suddenly recall a number of statements we have heard over the years: how president George W. Bush's claimed to have invaded Iraq based on a "gut feeling," or how Tony Blair insisted that he felt "the hand of history upon our shoulders."(Suskind, 2004; Blair, 1998) Or consider a Brexit supporter who argues that voting against British membership in the EU is a question of doing "what feels right," or Donald Trump's alleged ability to "speak directly to the gut, often bypassing the cerebral cortex altogether."(Freedland, 2016b) Students of international politics typically treat such statements as stock phrases to be ignored, but if Gendlin is right the expressions point us towards a crucial experience. They are all references to a felt sense.

It is a mistake, in other words, to only listen to what political actors say or to only watch their actions. Instead we should be interested in body language. Watch the posture of the world leaders as they assemble in front of the TV cameras and listen out for any statements regarding the posture of the countries they represent. What we will find is that a "forward-leaning" country, such as that represented by Dick Cheney in 2003, is prone to act quite differently from a country which, like France in 1940, is "lying on her

back."(Borger, 2003; Sartre, 1949, p. 51) Likewise, a leader such as Mao Zedong who has "stood up," is likely to behave quite differently from a leader, such as Nelson Mandela, who had "walked that long road to freedom," and who realizes that there still are many mountains to climb.(Mao, 1949; "In his own words," 2013) It is from these bodies, no matter how metaphorical, that emotions arise — a desire for revenge, a sense of determination, feelings of shame, humiliation, pride, vulnerability, invulnerability, and all others. "Is this what the feeling is like?," we can imagine ourselves asking the foreign minister or security advisor. "No," says our client, "that is not quite it. What I meant to say is ..." "I see," we say, "but there might also be this and that, no?" "Yes," they will acknowledge, "but you have to take into consideration that ..." Prodded in this fashion, the felt sense starts to speak, and drawing one implication after another, we learn more and more. Eventually, and with some luck, we will arrive at a stopping point; something has been revealed, a clearing has been made in the forest. The client exhales and says "OK, now I get it ..."

So what was going on in George W. Bush's gut and in Tony Blair's shoulder? Why did the Brexit supporter feel the way she did and how is Donald Trump able to bypass a voter's cerebral cortex? Take Bush's gut first. It is easy to imagine his gastric acids acting up in the wake of the 9/11 attacks — an acute stomach cramp giving way to a persistent sinking feeling.(Johnstone, 2012, pp. 179–200; Cf. Prinz, 2006) He had been asleep on his watch, betrayed his fellow Americans, and revealed himself and America as weak and vulnerable. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was his way of relieving this sense of unease. Likewise, the weight of the hand on Blair's shoulder indicates his sense of being anointed by Fate, of being called by Providence, of being under scrutiny by History. Blair, by all evidence, often felt attended to by capitalized abstractions such as these and this explains both the seriousness with which he took his responsibilities and the momentousness of his mistakes.

(Owen & Davidson, 2009, pp. 1396–1406) As for the Brexit voter, her satisfaction stems from a feeling of finally having spoken up to the powers-that-be. After years of not being listened to, the referendum was her chance to get it all off her chest: her awkwardness in relation to things foreign, her growing anxiety with the sheer uncertainty of life, the way her well-established habits no longer seemed to be working. She wanted her country back and she wanted to regain control. This is how she felt, she felt it in her body.(Freedland, 2016a) The Trump voter surely shared many of these sentiments, yet in his case it was fear more than anything that dictated the choice. It is fear after all which most effectively bypasses the cognitive processes of the cerebral cortex: fear of being invaded by Mexicans, Muslims and Chinese goods, fear of black men with guns and impostor presidents with foreign birth certificates. He voted Trump since only Trump can make him feel secure.

Or, to take another example, consider the case of a suicide bomber who kills himself together with a large number of his fellow human beings. Growing up as a regular child in the suburbs of a large European city he became “radicalized” in his late teens. He began to pray regularly and attend mosque, to dress in a Muslim fashion and not eat certain food. He refers to the will of God as the reason behind these choices but others say he was brain-washed by fundamentalist clerics. There are indeed reasons for what happened, the reasons have rational grounds and the rational grounds have further rational grounds, yet underneath all the rational grounds there is nothing but a felt sense. And it is against this felt sense that he constantly checks his choices. He does not fit in to the society into which he was born; he feels discriminated and humiliated.(Birzer & Smith-Mahdi, 2006, pp. 22–37; Gendlin, 1973, pp. 388–391) In response he has set himself alternative standards, and these are the standards his actions are designed to uphold. Leaving for *jihad* in Syria suddenly feels right and, returning home, so does killing innocent civilians.(Ash, 2006; Atran & Hamid, 2015)

Or take the case of a young American who decides to volunteer for the war in Iraq. Describing himself as “your normal North Carolina loser,” he tells you about his disappointments in life: his father who left home and family way too soon, his bad grades in school, his occasional drug use and inability to hold down a permanent job.(Wright, 2004, p. 235) These biographical facts can be described in sociological terms, or in terms of political economy, but they have a phenomenology too. There is a certain way it feels to be poor, and given this phenomenology, joining the military feels like the right thing to do. There is a bodily posture to being a military man after all — standing to attention, standing tall, straight back and chest out. The military promised him a new start, to make something out of him, to make him feel proud. Economic incentives played a role in the decision to enlist and perhaps politics entered into it too, but defending one's country feels right above all since it provides an opportunity to do one's duty. Doing one's duty is to stand up for what is right. Standing up feels good after years of slouching on a couch in North Carolina.

Consider, finally, the prospect of resolving conflicts and achieving peace. By investigating the felt sense, Gendlin suggests, we can explore the potential for reconciling opposing points of view.(Gendlin in Heuman, 2011, p. 109; Cf. Rosen, 2000, pp. 1–14) The issue to be investigated here is not the interests that divide us or the hostile claims we make, and reconciliation is not a matter of negotiating or of somehow integrating contradictory positions. Instead we need to get back to the origin which interests, claims and positions have in a felt sense. A phenomenological sensation of unease, anxious twitchings in the legs, an existential tension of the jaw, a stomach cramp, can be relieved in a large number of different ways and thereby result in many contradictory actions. (Ringmar, 2017b) But it is only by exploring the felt sense in which they all originate that we come to see the common origin which they share. Our respective bodies understand

each other far better than do our cognitive minds. This, Gendlin suggests, could be the beginnings of a mutual understanding.

5. Conclusion

Despite the trappings of a psychologist's couch and the confessional format of these engagements, you do not have to be a psychoanalyst to engage in this kind of research. Focusing, Gendlin explains, is ultimately not a psychoanalytical technique. Psychoanalysts analyze, that is obvious from their job title, but what is required here is not analysis or even thought. Instead we need to feel. The reason why we can understand the felt sense of other's is not that we have the requisite training, or any particular insights, but instead that we too have bodies. Likewise, we do not have to have a special training in the social sciences in order to understand the felt foundations of international politics. And if this sounds like an anti-intellectual point, it sounds that way because it is. International politics, at the very heart of it, is not an intellectual enterprise and to intellectualize it is to misunderstand it. Instead international politics is a matter of how human beings, and the collectivities which they have created, find themselves in the world. We rely on our minds to find these places for ourselves but, as Eugene Gendlin explains, above all, and before anything else, we rely on our bodies.

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