

A Brief Guide to *A Process Model*

Campbell Purton, Ph. D.

University of East Anglia

General structure

Gendlin has said “I do know that the Process Model is difficult to read partly because I don’t explain what I am doing until the last section of III and the section IVAd. These might be put first. I also think that some part of VIII is understandable near the beginning because that’s where the concepts come from.”

The last section of III is the one titled ‘Some motivations and powers of the model so far’. In this section Gendlin writes that his project is ‘to create an alternative model in which we define living bodies in such a way that one of them can be ours’. And - ‘We can speak from living, and we can make rudimentary concepts from speaking-from, and especially from focusing and from the process of explication. Since these are possible in reality, they can lead us to an alternative set of “basic” concepts of a “reality” in which we would not seem impossible.’

Gendlin believes that our current ways of thinking don’t really allow for the existence of human beings in the world. Our current ways of thinking separate ‘the world’ from what the world means to us; once that is done we are *outside* the world. Gendlin wants to bring us back *into* the world. But there is no place for us if we think of human beings with the current concepts about physical (physiological) systems. So to make room for us in the world, the world has to be re-thought. Gendlin’s concepts constitute a framework for this re-thinking.

The central concepts which he develops are drawn from the process of explicating the implicit intricacy of experiencing. It might seem strange to base a whole way of looking at the world on *this*, but it is not really so. Experiential explication and focusing are activities where there is the creation of meaning, so that in them we have the crucial thing which is left out of the current way of thinking. If we can develop a new way of thinking which allows for focusing and explication, then we have a way of thinking which allows there to be *us*.

In explicating the implicit intricacy of experiencing (VIII) a felt sense forms which carries us forward in a way that is different from the way we are carried forward in logic and mathematical science. In these disciplines what was there, such as '7+5' carries us forward to '12'. Or, from 'All men are mortal' and 'Socrates is a man' we are carried forward to 'Socrates is mortal'. The premises of a valid argument imply its conclusion. But in focusing, in explication, in every bit of life the next step is 'implied' in a different sense of 'implies'. This new sense of 'implies' is one of Gendlin's central concepts. Implying is the converse of carrying-forward: if one event implies another, then the second event carries forward the first.

Gendlin introduces this new sense of 'implies' in Ch 2, where he says that hunger *implies* feeding. This is not a logical implication (it is not part of the meaning of 'hunger' that it is always followed by eating). Nor is it a causal implication (since hunger can occur without eating following it). It is rather that eating is what will satisfy hunger, that hunger will continue until eating - or something else (such as intravenous feeding) - takes place. In the hunger there is the implying of feeding, but what 'feeding' amounts to can't be specified as any particular form of event. Feeding has to be defined in terms of 'that which removes the implying of feeding'.

Gendlin says (p. 9) 'hunger *is* being about to search for food, find it and eat it'. Hunger is both an occurrence and an implying. In Gendlin's scheme nothing is just itself - it always implies other things. In this way his scheme is different from the one that is familiar in science. In science we usually start with separate things (e.g. atoms or cells) which can in principle exist on their own. Then complex bodies are seen as being built up from these elements. Of course there are connections between the elements in the shape of the current laws of physics or chemistry, but the laws could in principle change without the elements changing. In the 'atomistic' view a thing doesn't imply anything beyond itself. Everything is, in Hume's phrase, 'loose and separate'; the connections are supplied by us, by our theories.

In Gendlin's scheme there are no loose and separate entities. Each entity implies others. One sort of 'other implied entity' is that which will carry forward the implying. For instance eating is what carries forward hunger. But there are also other implied entities - hunger implies a body, and a body implies an environment. There is a distinction here which Gendlin suggests lies at the basis of our concepts of time and space. He sees these concepts as being less fundamental than the concepts of implying and occurring. Time is a more abstract notion which derives from the fact that there are implyings which are carried forward by occurings; space derives from the other implyings. Rather than begin with space, time and matter, as in current ways of thinking, Gendlin begins with implying and occurring. The detailed discussions of space and time strike me as some of the most difficult parts of PM, but I think we need to appreciate that what Gendlin is doing is quite radical, so that we can get some feel for why PM starts in such a peculiar way with the body-environment terminology.

In his introductory note Gendlin says that he will 'lay down some terms as if they came out of nowhere'. Of course, the terms do come from somewhere - they come from what is needed if he is to be able to talk later in chapter VII about human things generally, and in chapter VIII about explicating the implicit. But at the start he wants to construct some concepts for talking about living things which will later allow there to be human beings in the world. There is an important sense in which PM starts with Chapter VIII, the new space of bodily-sensed implicit intricacy. The experienced world can't be constructed out of the physical-biological world as it is presently understood. So Gendlin reformulates the physical-biological world in a way which inevitably seems very odd if we don't know why he is doing it.

Section IVAd-2 is the next section in which Gendlin pauses to reflect on his strategy.

He says 'Our model begins with concepts which begin with interaction'. This is the principle which he calls 'interaction first'. In the model there are no fully separable things, events or processes. Everything is what it is through how it is affected by other things, which themselves are what they are through how they are affected by the first thing. Gendlin's story of the IF cans (in IVAe) may help us to get a first feel for this. It is the same point as is touched on by Paul Weiss quoted on p. 26 of ECM. (But remember that the IF cans are only a machine analogy. They differ from 'interaction first' in that (1) the adjustments are made in sequence, whereas in 'interaction first' or 'inter affecting' everything is there in one time instant, and (2) the adjustments are made from outside the system in accordance with a human goal, whereas in organic inter affecting the 'goal' emerges as what Gendlin calls the 'focaling' of the inter affecting. See IVAf for 'focaling'.)

In this section (IVAd-2) Gendlin says that 'interaction first' applies as much to temporal as to spatial relations. The present is a carrying-forward of the past, and the past implies the present. What we experience in the present clearly depends on the past, but what we experience as the past depends on what else is happening in the present. The notion of a time sequence in which events occur in sequence without inherent connections is a late development in human thinking, which belongs with mathematical units and independent particles moving in empty space. The real, lived world, however, is one in which nothing exists independently of its relations with other things.

In the sections following IVAd Gendlin continues to develop the concepts he requires. Sections I-V of PM are his general model. The model applies equally to bodily processes, behaviour, culture and language, and then the space of implicit intricacy. In Chapter VI he uses the model to rethink behaviour, in Chapter VIIA he uses it to derive patterns, *kinds*, and the making of things. In VIIB does the same for language. Roughly speaking, Chapter VI is concerned with the world of animals; in it Gendlin develops his 'interaction first' notions of behaviour, consciousness, perception, and motivation. These form a cluster of concepts which have application in the case of animals (sentient beings), but not in the case of plants. Human beings come into the picture in Chapter VII. Here all the concepts which applied in Ch VI still apply, but now there is another conceptual 'layer' which is associated with the *symbolic* ways in which human beings interact with one another. Chapter VII is concerned with the familiar human world with its cultural, linguistic, and conceptual forms.

In Chapter VIII we come to the further development which he sees as just beginning. When we can refer directly to the intricacy of experiencing, we retain the symbolic level, but enter into our bodily felt awareness of a *whole situation*, which always goes beyond what can be expressed in any particular set of symbols or cultural routines. This is a way of engaging with the world which may always have been available to creative individuals, but which is especially relevant in our 'post-modern' world in which it can seem that all symbolic forms are relative and arbitrary, as if there were nothing at all at the bottom.

One way of thinking about the structure of the book is, then, that Chapters I-V lay out the new conceptual scheme which centres around 'interaction first', and show how it applies to organisms in general. Chapter VI applies the scheme to animals, Chapter VII to the current human world, and Ch VIII to the hardly known space of bodily-sensed intricacy. The concepts developed for organisms in general are retained, but elaborated on, in the case of animals. Then the concepts which apply to animals are retained but elaborated on in the case of human ways of living, and similarly for the transition from the usual way to the focusing way. This scheme, in which the human world elaborates the animal world, and the animal world elaborates the vegetative world is very similar to that of Aristotle (Gendlin is among other things an Aristotelean scholar).

However the way in which each level is transformed into the next is unique to Gendlin's philosophy. Roughly speaking, the transitions become possible where a process at one level is not carried forward at that level. It is familiar in focusing that a process at the VII (usual human) level may not be carried forward by any familiar emotion, shared meaning, or common phrases. In the usual human world emotions and sayings occur within typical situations, one or another move *within* a familiar "story." Instead, someone who can bring their attention into their bodily-felt space, can sense *there* this *whole* situation which can never be done with the standard cultural responses that always occur within a situation. From the felt sense may then come a new way of responding which is finely tuned to carry that whole situation forward. In responding in this way the person does not dispense with symbols. Newly phrased words or images arise from the felt sense. One can check possible responses with the bodily felt sense. The felt sense responds to symbolic moves. The felt sense is, as Gendlin puts it, a 'feedback object,' really a sequence of whole-whole-whole, carrying the situation forward. Experiential explication presupposes symbolising, although it takes us beyond the currently existing symbols.

But just as focusing (VIII) presupposes symbolising (VII), so symbolising presupposes behaving (VI). In chapter VII Gendlin outlines the very complex way in which symbolising can arise out of situations where behaving does not carry one forward. The natural behavioural response to an insult would perhaps be anger and attack, but in human cultures such 'natural' responses may not carry us forward effectively. Instead of actual fighting, something is said. In the human world "action" consists largely of speech. The situation is carried forward on that (VII) level. Gendlin shows how the transition is prefigured in animal threat displays. Speaking or gesturing is still a (specialised) form of behaviour.

Then again, behaviour presupposes biological tissue processes. Speech and gestures, like any other behaviour, require muscle movements and nerve firings. During some portions of an organism's life behaviour is not required. (Plants don't have behaviour at all - their needs are satisfied without any moving around). However, in the case of animals, the environment does not provide for all physiological needs without the necessity for behaviour. The physiological processes associated with hunger stir the animal into action which continues until feeding has taken place. Then the animal rests, becomes more like a plant for a while. The behaviour is the animal's way of carrying forward physiological processes which are carried forward in plants without behaviour. With social animals the patterns of behaviour become increasingly complex: the animal may need not only to hunt but also to threaten another animal in a social hierarchy. A human being may express this threat verbally in a culturally appropriate way. When there is no appropriate cultural form available, most people are left with much of their living narrowed and stifled, but increasingly we are developing a further level. We learn to give attention to the bodily felt sense of *this whole situation* and find finely ordered new steps coming to us to create a way forward.

However, even someone engaged in focusing on their situation has to say and do *something*, engage in physical behaviour, and of course tissue changes. Focusing involves the use of symbols, symbolising involves a complex background of changing behavioural potentials, and these involve physiological changes. It is for this reason that focusing is a physical process which has physical effects. Of course it *must* have physical effects if a person is to be different in their actual living. But what the 'physical' is, has to be re-thought in a way which allows us to understand how focusing can do this.

I have said something about the structure of PM insofar as that structure relates to the different 'layers' of bodily process, behaviour, culture, language, and direct reference of the implicit intricacy. There is much more to the details of each of these: in the chapter on behaviour (VI) Gendlin shows how sentience and perception can be seen as arising out of behaviour that does not involve consciousness, and how this involves a new kind of space (behaviour space) in which the animal moves. In VII he discusses how symbolic and linguistic forms of behaviour can develop and, with them, the forms of space and time with which we are familiar. In VIII he elaborates the theory of implicitly intricate experiencing on the basis of what has been developed previously, showing how in VIII we again enter a new kind of space with its own characteristic objects. It becomes clear here that we are only one step into an entirely new level of human understanding which moves between direct experiential reference and conceptual forms. There is much more also in the section on the general model (I- V), some of which will be familiar to readers of Gendlin's *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*.

In addition to all this there is another theme running through PM. As we have seen Gendlin pauses at times and reflects on what he is doing. What he is doing comes from Chapter VIII, the chapter in which concept-formation from implicit intricacy is discussed. PM is itself an innovation of this kind; Gendlin builds PM through developing concepts in a way that is

theoretically underpinned by the material in VIII. He himself sees the method of concept formation (made accessible in TAE) as more important than the theory which he has developed to explain it. The PM is only the first model of this new kind. This is the same attitude as that which he takes in *Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams*, where he says (pp. 141, 162) ‘If you don’t like this theory, don’t let it get in the way of the experiential steps which the book describes. You don’t need the theory for them... Theory does not represent what “is.” Theory makes sense, but sense-making is itself a kind of step which expands what “was”. That opens to further steps, and these need not stay consistent with the theory.’

Some specific issues

Chapters I-V:

Gendlin’s model is a *process* model. The more familiar model starts with individual things (such as atoms) and then develops the notions of change, and connections with other things. The things in that model are essentially separate, and are only linked externally through being in the same space-time framework, and being subject to the laws of motion. In this model the problem is how to explain change and interdependence within a basic framework in which the things (the atoms) stay the same, and are separate from each other.

In Gendlin’s model the problem is the opposite: we need to be able to account for stability (lack of change) and for individual entities, within a basic framework in which everything is in a process, a sequence, and each thing depends on other things.

The Process Model *begins with* change, process, interaction.

It starts with ‘**implying**’, which is already a concept involving connection and change.

Into the implying something occurs, which may or may not carry the implying forward.

If the implying is not carried forward, the **process is stopped**, and the **implying remains the same**. This is the first point at which, in starting from change, we get to something which does not change.

When something occurs which resumes the process it is as if that something is '**recognised**'. There is again something that is 'the same'.

We don't yet have the concept of a body, but there is already a *distinction* between the **stopped process** and the **other processes which continue**. Here is a first *separation* within the interaffecting whole.

We can say that "**the body**" is what continues when a process is stopped. The body carries the stopped process.

Processes **interaffect**. They are what they are through being affected by the other processes which have already been affected by them.

An **occurrence** is a **focaling** of all the involved processes.

pp. 75-7: **Intervening events** develop in a stoppage – Gendlin calls them 'stop/on's'. Some of these intervening events involve repetition or reiteration, which he terms '**leafing**': the first bit of the stopped process repeats with minor differences, forming a new kind of sequence.

We will see this pattern itself being repeated at different 'levels' later – what is stopped at one level carries forward on another level.

The reiterations are versions of the stopped process. They '**version**' that process.

(Consistently with the model, Gendlin tends to turn noun forms into verbs, so that we get terms like 'versioning' and 'sequencing').

pp. 80-82: There are two distinct kinds of change, that of **interaffecting**, and that of **occurring**. This is important, but needs some explanation:

Consider two processes, such as those of walking and breathing in some organism such as a bug.

Interaffecting:

Walking and breathing interaffect since the bug is an interaffecting system

The walking would be different if the breathing were different and vice versa.

Any change in the walking is also a change in the breathing, and vice versa.

Any change in walking happens at the same time as a change in behaviour. The walking and the breathing are two aspects of what is occurring. In interaffecting it doesn't take time for one aspect to affect the other. 'This is basic to what an implicit order is' (p.82). But if this were the whole story, there would be no *sequence* of changes. *Everything would occur at once.*

Occurring:

Now suppose some dust falls onto the surface on which the bug is walking. This is an en-change which is not an interaffecting change (the falling of the dust is not caused in the bug). The bug's walk now stirs up the dust, and its walk changes because walking in the dust affects how its legs can move.

This change happens immediately the dust falls, but nothing more happens as a result. In the new en the bug has a different walk. Again, there is no ongoing sequence of changes.

The changed walk/breathing is an actual occurrence, caused by the en change.

The change in the walk due to the change in the breathing is an interaffecting change.

However, in reality there are both interaffecting changes and en changes, and it is this which generates the *sequence* of changes:

The bug's walk changes because of the en change. The changed walk stirs up the dust. The dust affects the bug's breathing. The changed breathing, by interaffecting, is also a change in the walk. This changed walk makes a difference to how the dust is stirred up, and that again affects the breathing etc.

Chapter VI: Behaving, feeling, perception, motivation

One kind of intervening event (occurring within a behaviour stoppage) is reiteration, where the first bit of the stopped process repeats. These repetitions 'version' the stoppage. If there are many such reiterative processes we can think of these as a special sector of the organism. This sector is 'pulsing' (as if sending out radar signals) and changes in the en or in the rest of the organisms body are registered by the changes they make in the pulsing.

The reiterative sector, '**the registry**' of the organism is thus especially sensitive to changes. It registers changes, both in the en and in the rest of the organism.

It is not only that changes in the environment (en) and in the rest of the body produce changes in the registry. Also, the changes in the registry produce changes in the organism - the organism moves as a result of what it is registering. These movements are not simply effects of en changes (like a hole being worn in a shell by the sea), they are movements the organism itself makes because of what it is registering. The organism is now *behaving*, not just moving.

Its movements are themselves registered along with the changes in the en.

pp 93-4: Behaviour is a new kind of carrying-forward. The behaviour is a version of the stoppage of a process. That process is still implied in the behaviour. If the appropriate en-aspect occurs the process will resume (the implying of the process 'is still there'; it is there implicitly). But while the stoppage is there, and the behaviour is occurring, there is a new kind of carrying-forward: the organism's movements result in changes in the registry, which in turn affect the organism's movements.

With further development, the organism's movements come to imply the changes in the registry which the movements usually make. At this stage of development, if these registry changes actually occur they carry forward the implying. If what is actually registered is different from what was implied then that behaviour sequence stops (the lamb stops at the cliff edge).

p. 95: The organism is registering the changes it generates as it moves - it is *feeling* them. It is conscious. The registrations themselves can be thought of as *perception*. So far, feeling and perception occur only as aspects of behaving. (Feelings and perceptions that are separate

from overt behaviour only come later.) The behaviour continues until the stopped process resumes: this resumption could be thought of as the 'goal' of the behaviour (though this would be a 'too-early' use of 'goal'). We can also say that the behaviour is **motivated** by what would resume the stopped process.

p. 102: Many behaviour sequences develop. They form a 'space' in which each has implications for the possibilities of the others. As we shall see, with the development of a new 'level' there comes a corresponding kind of space.

p. 109: Behaviour sequences can generate stable objects, such as the registry of the bird when the cat chases it. The bird is only there as the cat runs so that the whole scene, trees, grass, stones, rapidly pass the cat by. Objects 'fall out from' the animal's behaviour. What these objects are for a particular animal depends on that animal's life and behaviour. Objects are not just there, the same things for all animals.

Chapter VII: Gesturing, self-awareness, looks, sounds, language

p. 122: Much behaviour occurs in relation to other members of the species. When a behavioural interaction is stopped, the first bit may still occur, and repeat. This is gesturing, 'the dance'. This is the beginning of the next level.

The gesturing is a rendering, a versioning, of the current behavioural context. Since at this stage the organisms are animals they already have feelings and an awareness of their environment, but now the gesturing sequence adds an awareness *of* their own feelings.

This self-awareness happens initially only in the presence of another animal, but later such awareness can be triggered by objects which are relevant to the behaviour context.

At the same time a new kind of space is forming, a human space in which there is the possibility of standing back from behaviour, symbolising it without actually performing the behaviour. This kind of space is very different from behaviour space, which is constituted by all the possible implications, i.e. the ways in which any one behaviour sequence changes the possibility of the others.

The new kind of sequence involves the looks (sounds, images, motions) of things. This is the beginning of *kinds* of things - a look is the look of *that kind* of thing, although 'kinds' have not yet fully appeared. Sounds are similarly the sounds of kinds of things. Moaning is the sound of that kind of behaviour context – for example, a wounded animal. It is inherently connected with how the body of the animal is at that point. But then things generally come to have looks or sounds. There can now be the *moaning of the wind* as well as the wind itself.

Sounds, especially, come to express behaviour contexts, and this is the beginning of language. At the start the sounds are ikonic (onomatopaeic) symbols - they are the sounds *of* that behaviour context. But as the sounds of various behaviour contexts develop and interact in new contexts, the sound patterns begin to form a system of their own.

Nevertheless language is not a matter of mere convention; it is rooted in the body and behaviour processes out of which it emerged. (This is why rituals can have deep effects).

At this stage, instead of gesturing being an occasional pause in action, action now consists largely of language. This is the FLIP (p 165), after which we are in a fully human world.

Summarising up to the end of Chapter VII:

Body-process can be stopped, and behaviour then emerges as a detour in the process. The behaviour is still body-process, but has in addition a new form which elaborates the original kind of body process. The behaviour is a version of (it versions) the stopped body-process. It is a sequence of changes in the stopped process (it sequences the stoppage.)

Similarly behaviour can be stopped, and gesturing, symboling, and language then emerge as a detour in behaviour. Symboling sequences the same stoppage. It is still behaviour, but it is a new form which elaborates the original kind of behaviour. The symboling (gesturing, speaking, dancing) is a version of (it versions) the stopped behaviour. It is a sequence of changes in the stopped behaviour (it sequences the behaviour).

Chapter VIII: Bodily sense of a whole situation, focusing

Now in the same way *symboling* can be stopped, and as before something new can emerge. Symboling is stopped when we can't find the word (image, gesture, etc) which will carry us forward. This is the situation we are in when focusing. As in the other cases of stoppage, the first part of the usual process occurs again and again. The stopped process continues to be implied. If one can refer directly to this implying as a bodily sense that can form, there is a new level of process in a new space. There is a new kind of object or datum -- the *bodily sense of* the whole situation, and a newly separate "I" who can await the steps of carrying forward which come as a new sequence. Where only stoppage and paradox were possible on the usual level, new symboling patterns beyond the usual cultural, linguistic and conceptual patterns arise from the implicit intricacy of experiencing. All the sequences of culture and language are implicitly carried forward in a new way, just as in gesturing, behaviour is still going on, but in a new way. And just as gesturing brings with it a new kind of space (symbolic space, pattern and image space), so VIII brings with it a new kind of space. It is a space in which we can *'have'* a bodily sensed version of our situation *as a whole*.

This space is different from image-space, which belongs in VII. We know for example that if we imagine (visualise) putting a problem down while focusing, there still remains the question of whether it has *really* been put down. It can be put down in VII space without being put down in VIII space.

It is only with the concepts of VIII that focusing can be described adequately. But because each level is built on previous levels, changes which occur through focusing are at the same time changes in symbolisation, in behaviour and in bodily process. That is why Focusing can change us.

REFERENCES:

For more on Gendlin's theory see Appendix B of *Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams* (Wilmette: Chiron, 1986), and also the theory section of his paper 'The client's client: the edge of awareness' in RL Levant & JM Shlien (eds) *Client-centered Therapy and the Person-Centered Approach*. New York: Praeger (1984). These are much easier to read than PM itself, but of course they omit much important detail.