Thinking at the Edge with Luso-Brazilian Performers

Introducing Affective Methodologies for Artists and Researchers

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This article aims at introducing Thinking at the Edge (TAE) as a methodology to research affect, both in artistic processes and in academic research. Developed by the philosopher and psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin, TAE is a method that explores implicit meaning at the edges of words from a singular bodily felt sense, which is nonetheless culturally informed. Enabling the articulation of tacit meaning, TAE can be a stimulating tool to expand common definitions or usages of a topic relevant to one's professional practice. In this text, I present two TAE processes: one with Portuguese actor and director Miguel Fragata, who picked the term "communication," and another with Brazilian performer and choreographer Gustavo Ciríaco, who chose "perception." I will be arguing that TAE is a unique democratic tool that pushes intuitive knowing to the fore allowing for original and creative thinking both for practitioners and researchers.

Este artigo tem por objetivo apresentar Thinking at the Edge (TAE) como método para investigar a experiência dos afetos, quer em processos artísticos quer na pesquisa académica. Criado pelo filósofo e psicoterapeuta Eugene Gendlin, TAE é um método que explora o sentido implícito das palavras a partir de uma consciência corporal ("sentido-sentido") da experiência singular, não obstante, culturalmente informada. Possibilitando a articulação de significados tácitos, TAE pode ser um instrumento estimulante para expandir definições ou usos comuns de um termo relevante para as práticas profissionais de cada um e de todos. Neste texto, apresento dois processos TAE: um com o ator e encenador português Miguel Fragata, que escolheu o termo "comunicação," e outro com o performer e coreógrafo brasileiro Gustavo Ciríaco, que escolheu "perceção." Defenderei que TAE é uma ferramenta democrática única reveladora de conhecimentos

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intuitivos que permitem um pensamento criativo e original, tanto para artistas quanto para investigadores.

Thinking with the Body

In this text, I will introduce a methodology called *Thinking at the Edge* (TAE) from the perspective of two Portuguese native speaking artists whose processes I have accompanied. Instead of a detailed explanation of each step, I will interweave a brief analysis of their findings with the methodological framework, highlighting aspects of the process relevant to its potential interest to creative processes and affect research from a Luso-Brazilian vantage point. I hope this article can contribute to further research on affect, namely by expanding on the performers' singular findings about the topics they chose to explore (communication and perception), as well as encouraging artists to use this tool in their artistic research and practices to connect them to what they already know but are unable to express.

I will be arguing that Gendlin's TAE provides an accessible methodology that brings one into contact with tacit knowledge, enabling creating and thinking with the body as it builds from this felt sense. TAE opens a space for listening to felt sense, articulating meaning that could not have been articulated before, building a confident, and empowered attitude. Tapping the underlying felt qualities of performance, TAE can be a stimulating tool for performance artists, researchers, and students alike, offering renewed ways of creating, and debating issues of affect and emotion in performance, making sure these individuals start off with what is important for them.

Devised by American psychotherapist and philosopher Eugene Gendlin, together with Mary Hendricks, at the University of Chicago in the 1990s and early 2000s, TAE consists of a fourteen-step protocol that enables thinking with one's felt sense about something inside their area of expertise, seeking to expand its common usages and definitions. Deeply listening to this affective knowledge enables one to articulate a layer of unformed meaning of experience that usually remains in the background as impressions or vague sensations.

Close to Daniel Stern's vitality affects (Stern), felt sense encompasses all experience; it is tacit knowledge, unformed meaning that lies at an implicit and intricate level of experience, which Gendlin developed a method to disclose. Felt sense is information about the actual interaction of the body with the environment. This self-sensing competence is felt, though it is not a feeling; it is both "unclear" and "more determinate" as well as revealing both what is present and implying what is "not-yet-formed."[1] If one is able to find the felt sense of a given situation and stay with it long enough, one can witness unexpected constellations of meaning emerging from that "murky" zone,

which can then be articulated in words. For that one needs to listen to the body "under your thoughts."[2]

Felt sense as a point of departure for researching affect reshapes practices of creating and thinking. TAE is a potentially endless resource to fuel both artistic practices and theory-making insofar as it provides for connecting with the felt qualities of experience and articulating them in a fresh and unique way. It is a practice of listening to bodily sensations in order to discern unmapped associations and connections about a term or topic that are important to the person going through the process. TAE enables one to express what one knows already but could not previously express. This is precisely why TAE could be an incredibly sophisticated tool in artistic processes and scholarship.

Researching the affective realm of experience raises methodological issues as seen in *Affective Methodologies*.[3] The editors account for several strategies which enable new possibilities. They understand that affect research requires embodied and performative methods, but the essays the book offers are either centered on sociological, ethnographic, and psychological areas or anchored in a methodological attitude (affective attunement, affective resonance, affective textualities), rather than on specific methodologies and techniques. How exactly can we attune to affect? In what ways is performative writing responding to affective processes?

Over the years, affect theorists Kathleen Stewart and Lauren Berlant have been experimenting with collaborative formats to research the politics of affect in everyday life. In their book *The Hundreds*, they write short texts about scenes of everyday life obeying the rule that all texts must be one hundred or multiples of one hundred words. Inspired by poetry and public feelings workshops, the book attunes to affective life by focusing on writing techniques that can interrupt and rewire our awareness of affective experience. Likewise, focusing—the technique used in TAE and also devised by Gendlin (*Focusing*)—is an interruption of the everyday to find the words that best describe our felt sense about some aspect of our experience. As a method for thinking creatively and creating new concepts, TAE explores the language of our felt sense using writing exercises. However, it differs from other writing techniques insofar as it connects writing directly to the layer of implicit bodily knowledge that is usually left unsaid. Tapping affective meaning unique to each person, it brings felt meaning to the surface of language, opening a space for the emergence of sensorial and felt imaginaries.

Meaning at the Edge of Words

Similar to TAE in more than one way, Elicitation Interview Technique is an interesting example of a protocol firmly grounded in empathetic listening and negotiation that aims at verbalizing experience (namely the implicit features

of actions through sensorial memory).[4] This technique has been proposed as a pedagogical tool to raise awareness of embodied and implicit ways of knowing in dance, improving ways of transmitting such knowledge and experience.[5] More than a technique, TAE's methodological approach goes a step further. Not only does it seek to articulate implicit aspects of experience, but it also draws upon tacit meaning to elaborate creative and imaginative new perspectives on the issue in question. Its distinctive feature consists of disclosing unique bodily insights and discerning felt meaning to devise fresh starts for creative thinking and artistic practices. Originality *per se* is not the issue here. It is not about doing or thinking something new but rather thinking in terms that are relevant to the person going through the process.

The first two phases of a TAE process are dedicated to contacting the felt sense of the word (to articulate implicit knowledge by exploring language and lived situations), and the third phase is committed to formulating concepts and developing a theoretical framework (to expand common definitions of that term). All steps of the protocol involve sensing, writing, and listening to the body to find the right match between the felt sense and words, what Gendlin called an "aha" moment. The companion is crucial here. He or she is often required to read the person's writings aloud so that the latter can check the resonance of the word with his or her felt sense. It is important to note that the companion does not lead the process or direct answers in any way; instead, he or she guides the person through the process and supports it by engaged listening, the only ongoing communication between the person going through the process and his or her bodily felt sense. Finally, the performers speak from a place of expertise in which they have appropriated theatre, dance, and performance concepts, as well as cultural imprints in experiencing involved meaning-making processes. In fact, knowing the field is a prerequisite of this methodology. Thus, it is from their expertise that artists can articulate felt dimensions of experience through the cultural contours of verbal language.

Material for this article was collected between June 2018 and February 2019 in Lisbon: Portuguese actor and director Miguel Fragata, who picked the term "communication," and the Brazilian performer and choreographer Gustavo Ciríaco, who chose the term "perception." Each complete process took an average of 5–8 sessions, and each session took about an hour and a half. The time span of each process was very much conditioned by the performers' professional commitments as well as the length of each session being dictated by the different speed and ease with which they became familiarized with TAE, and especially with felt sense. I chose these two performers not only because we share Portuguese as a native language but also due to their curiosity and a personal connection with me, without which research demanding this kind of investment (with no proper budget) could not proceed. The sessions were not recorded. Both the performers and I took notes of each exercise. Sometimes I

asked them to brainstorm sensations that I would write down and read back to them aloud; other times I asked them to write, and they would read that aloud. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the problematic position of publishing research in English that was carried out in Portuguese, especially when it engages with language. I am well aware of the cultural landscape embedded in language as experience and meaning production processes imply contexts, referents, and social worlds. Although I will not address this as a topic of discussion in the article, I will provide the reader with the original phrasings in brackets. For a similar reason, all translations were approved by the performers.

Miguel Fragata: The Felt Sense of Communication

"Choose a term relevant to your artistic practice that you would like to explore," I say. Actor and director Miguel Fragata picks the term "communication."[6] We start with a session digging into his felt sense about this. I ask Miguel Fragata to sit down, relax, and close his eyes. This is vital in order to clear the space around and within, preparing for listening. How does communication feel for you, from the inside? Notice bodily sensations: where do you feel in your body when you think of the meaning of communication for you? Pay attention to images or memories that might emerge as well when you focus on the word "communication." Checking in with his body, he says:

> The sensation comes from the chest area. It feels like a to-and-fro movement, something that is projected outwards while pushing you backwards, elevating you. It is a strong and intense sensation, violently forceful. And then something bright shines through. However, this happens only when communication is actually possible, when it happens. [A sensação está na zona do peito. Tem um movimento de vaivém, qualquer coisa que sai projetada e que te atira para outra zona, para trás, que te eleva. É uma sensação forte e intensa, uma força violenta. Há qualquer coisa de luz que irradia. A sensação aparece só quando a comunicação é possível, quando acontece verdadeiramente.][7]

Becoming familiar with contacting felt sense is crucial for the process. It requires some time to unlock the right place to look into, to shut down the mental stream of thoughts and let sensations emerge. Initial relaxation and constant checking in with the body's resonance to new words are key procedures.

"Can you think of a moment in your life when you've felt that way?" He remembers a situation in which he was debating ideas for a new project with a collaborating artist. I ask him to describe this in detail, avoiding the narrative behind it, just sticking to the facts and the sensations they provoked. Looking into the specifics of the particular situation, Miguel Fragata realizes two simultaneous sensations were involved: one feels something like an outward

movement (like "hitting the right spot, which is confirmed when the other person confirms by nodding" ["acertar no ponto, confirmado com o abanar da cabeça e a concordância da pessoa que está à minha frente"] and the other is a "kind of feeling right sensation that comes, in this specific situation, with relief, relaxation, joy, adrenaline, and enthusiasm" ["sensação de encaixe, neste caso concreto, é alívio, descontração, grande alegria, adrenalina, entusiasmo"].[8] Recalling a specific lived situation is key in TAE to finding facets of felt sense that carry forward new important aspects and fresh perspectives on the term. Felt sense is this knowledge that is both unclear and precise about the situation as a whole, chosen by the body at a deep and intricate level.

At the end of the first session, I ask him to write a sentence that defines communication for him at this point. The sentence must include all the relevant new features: "Communication is carving thoughts; touching in the right spot." ["Comunicar é esculpir o pensamento, tocando no ponto certo."][9] In some cases, this first sentence contains the keywords that will keep returning throughout the process; others are quickly replaced. In the case of Miguel Fragata, this sentence became a distant echo after further exploring the edges of the word "communication." The bodily sensation, instead, remained exactly the same, although richer, more nuanced.

The following step of the protocol consists of word replacement exercises. Realizing the usual usages of the term do not include everything that the person understands as significant for it, the idea is to expand on what the person would like the word to mean. This is the point when the illogical or paradoxical aspects of felt sense unfold, which, according to Gendlin, is where novelty is rooted. For Fragata, hitting the right spot requires a somewhat paradoxical "uncontrolled burst of words and ideas" ["jorro de palavras e ideias"].[10] Something untamed and out of control is needed to reach the goal with precision. This uncontrolled burst of ideas was also described as a "to-and-fro movement" ["vaivém"] (as in the chest sensation) or as a "comet" ["cometa"] (as in something bright shining through).[11] It is interesting to note that in every TAE process I have participated in, paradoxes were never problematic for performers. Fundamental to aspects of the experienced reality of live performance, paradoxes instantly blended with the performer's train of thought.

However, performers can be struck by insightful connections that apparently unrelated situations or events disclose. In Fragata's case, simply crossing a street reveals a significant feature of communication.

> Completely absorbed in a cellphone conversation in the street [Lisbon]. A person, noticeably disturbed, comes from the opposite direction. We pass by each other. I stop to cross the street because there isn't a crosswalk. When I am about to start crossing, the person is next to me. He grabs me saying

> incomprehensible things and we face each other. The minute I finish the call he throws himself at me. The man's physical attitude is defensive, but his words are threatening. Despite the mismatch, something efficient happened. I shout something at the man. The man steps back and goes away while I cross the street. A common ground of understanding emerges—more physical, animal, instinctive. [Estou na rua a falar ao telefone completamente concentrado na conversa. Cruzo-me com uma pessoa que está num estado alterado. Cruzamo-nos em direções opostas. Paro para atravessar a estrada, um sítio sem passadeira. Quando vou mesmo a atravessar, essa pessoa está ao meu lado. Puxa-me dizendo coisas incompreensíveis, olhamo-nos. Terminando a chamada, ele investe sobre mim. Ele faz um movimento de defesa, mas o discurso é de ataque. Nesse desencontro, algo muito eficaz acontece: eu grito-lhe qualquer coisa e ele recua. Há um entendimento e a situação desfaz-se. O tipo recua, vai-se embora e eu atravesso a estrada. Nesse momento, cria-se um chão comum de entendimento — mais físico, animal, instintivo.][12]

Shouting does not come across as an obvious image of a successful communication process but there was something about the felt sense of the situation that carried forward a sense akin to the sense of hitting the right spot. Staying with the felt sense, Fragata realizes communication demands a physical and instinctual common understanding to happen in such a luminous way. It is the scream, rather than the verbal content of words, that triggers the man's reaction, and a "common ground"[13] is immediately established between them. Interestingly, at this point in the process, the image of a common ground as a relevant aspect of communication was already in place. What this instance allowed for was a more accurate insight into the possible features involved in establishing this: not only an intellectual understanding of what is being communicated, but also "a more physical, animal, instinctive understanding"[14] may be required to communicate in the first place.

In theatrical encounters, instinctive and sensorial communication is crucial, especially for someone like Fragata, who has been working with and for children since 2013. Fragata has been internationally praised for his projects for young audiences (more recently for teenagers as well) devised together with Inês Barahona.[15] Their shows have toured widely in Portugal and Europe. With eyes set on timely issues (for instance, the refugee crisis in Europe) or metaphysical concerns about death, they have developed a particular aesthetics of care, in dialogue with young audiences, combining a delicate sensibility with a playful theatrical experience. An instinctual common ground is crucial to engage with young audiences because it provides room for children to respond in their timing (in the show or after the show), to playfully interact with what they see (or not), and, most of all, to engage them fully: affectively, sensorially, and cognitively.

Full Presence

If there is one thing anyone who has attended a performance for younger audiences surely knows, it is that children are unable to fake responses to what happens onstage: they might be absorbed and in silence; they might laugh or cry; they might start fidgeting if they are bored; or they might speak their minds with sudden comments and questions. But they will not fake it. Discerning a facet of communication as more physical, animal, and instinctual offers an insight into the particular common ground established between performers and these kinds of audiences. It raises awareness about the specific kind of common ground required. Young audiences openly negotiate their space of interaction and response during the performance. As Miguel Fragata further details, communication requires a common ground for negotiation:

> Individual spaces should be balanced, equal; spaces that grow and diminish for exchange to happen. (. . .) Signals are needed that confirm everyone is on the same page. They correspond to the moment when individual space grows or diminishes. They cannot be faked. [Os espaços têm de ser equilibrados, equivalentes; espaços que crescem e diminuem para haver troca. (. . .) São precisos sinais do encaixe, de confirmação do entendimento. Os sinais correspondem ao momento de crescimento e diminuição do espaço. Não se podem fabricar os sinais.][16]

In TAE's third phase, the focus of the work is building the core of a theory that considers all the crucial facets of communication. Going through all his notes, Miguel Fragata made a list of terms to be temporarily interlocked in phrases that would be arranged and re-arranged using logical procedures (A IS B, A IS C, B IS C; A is inherently B, A is B, which is C; and so on). He picked three terms/phrases from the list and interlocked them in new sentences, playing around with the order according to the procedures until he reached a sentence containing the crux of his felt sense about communication. After repeating these steps with other terms from the list, Fragata shortlisted three phrases: A_"a to-and-fro movement based on a common ground" ["um vaivém a partir de um chão comum"] + B_"creating space for each other's spaces" ["criar espaço para os espaços de cada um"] + C_"being fully present" ["estar lá por inteiro"].[17] Each new variation of a sentence needs to be doublechecked with one's felt sense, so I read every sentence out loud, and Miguel Fragata listened, with his eyes closed, and picked the one that felt right.

This is his final sentence: "Communication **IS** a to-and-fro movement based on a common ground **IS** creating space for each other's spaces, **WHICH IS** being fully present." ["Comunicação é um vaivém a partir de um chão comum é criar espaço para os espaços de cada um, que é estar lá por inteiro."][18] After trying all possible alternatives, this was the version that most strongly

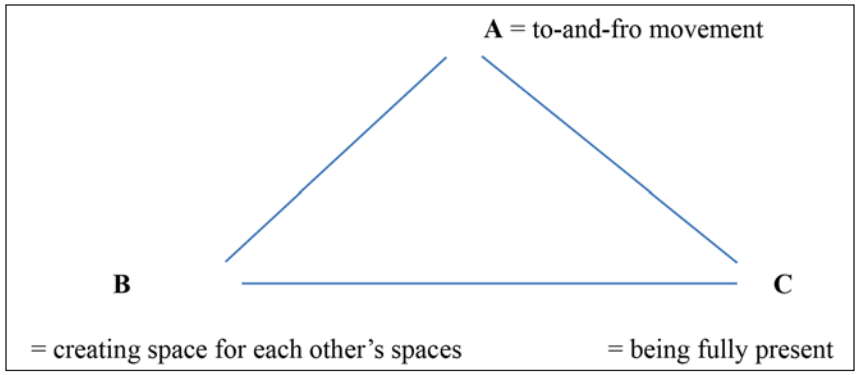

Figure 1. Diagram in Miguel Fragata's TAE process.[19]

resonated with Miguel Fragata's felt sense. In short, throughout his process Miguel Fragata was able to make it explicit that communication is a rare thing and depends on several conditions. A common ground is a basic requirement for the to-and-fro movement; it opens negotiation processes, both verbal and non-verbal; and lastly, communication involves being fully present. For Fragata, being fully present happens when thought and its (verbal and bodily) expression are in synch.

Significantly, the phrase "being fully present" cropped up while describing a lived situation with a child. Miguel Fragata and his daughter were playing at a table cluttered with housework and miniature furniture as well as several human and animal toys. At first, Miguel Fragata told me, he felt a bit distant from the situation, his mind drifting. At some point:

> Something in the situation made me immerse in the game, and it triggered a flow of ideas for situations, and ideas start falling like rain drops. Narratives come up, games, one after the other. There's a connection, a bridge between thoughts and what we were playing that allows for that overflow of ideas. Suddenly, there is a passage between mind and body that is connected to being fully present. [Há qualquer coisa na situação que me faz mergulhar no jogo e começam a cair ideias para as situações, uma coisa tipo pingos de chuva a cair. Vão surgindo narrativas, brincadeiras, umas atrás das outras. Há uma conexão, uma ponte entre o pensamento e o objeto da brincadeira que dá aso a essa cadência das coisas. De repente, há uma passagem entre corpo e cabeça que tem a ver com o estar lá por inteiro.][20]

Being fully present is to a certain extent a familiar expression in theatre jargon, meaning "the state of flow"[21] to which performers can have access onstage which consists of a focused, heightened experience in a borderless

space-time zone. However, describing it as a "passage" reinforces a sense of openness, constant shifting or adjusting as a crucial aspect of communication.[22] Fragata's felt sense suggested that spaces not only need to be negotiated at different sensorial, instinctual, cognitive, and affective layers between individuals but also within performers themselves. I would argue that this passage reflects an aspect of Fragata's initial felt sense. It is something bright shining through in the process of communication, a sparkling flow of ideas and words that, like the word "community" with which it shares an etymology, enhances a feeling of belonging, participating in something together.

Gustavo Ciríaco: The Superpowers of Perception

When improvising, performers must get into a highly receptive state and be ready to promptly decide and act. Their attention is heightened: they tune into entangled layers of information at play in the moment and make decisions on how to respond accordingly. We do this all the time, but the work of performers magnifies and surfaces what is at stake in decision-making processes: listening. Key to improvising, deep listening can allow us to attune and respond to the situation as a whole. Such attunement can feel like a superpower: "When I first started improvising," performer and choreographer Gustavo Ciríaco told me, "I felt like I had superpowers." ["Quando comecei a improvisar, sentia muito como se tivesse super poderes."][23] Ciríaco's felt sense of perception echoed a childhood memory. After watching *Superman* or *Star Wars* in a movie theatre, Ciríaco walked in the city feeling a heightened sensorial awareness, which resurfaced later in dance improvisations:

> I felt that dancing with many people at the same time—like in parties—allowed me to understand group movements. It was like diving into the sensation of movement inside another body. ["Dançando com muitos outros ao mesmo tempo—a sensação de festa—dá para entender com são as movências, o movimento dos outros. Era um mergulho na sensação de movimento noutro corpo."][24]

In many ways, perception lies at the core of Gustavo Ciríaco's choreographic research.[25] Since the early 2000s, Ciríaco has been inviting audiences to experience familiar situations of encounters or configurations of reality through different angles and perspectives, sometimes outside the proscenium theatre, others experimenting with auditorium features. Between visual and performing arts, his work has been presented in festivals, galleries, museums, and theatres in Latin America, Europe, and Asia. Part of his works are specifically devised for the city, for instance, in the realm of the collaborative project *City Labs* (with Fernanda Eugénio, ongoing) and the performance *Onde o horizonte se move* (2012.)[26] These projects explore geometries of affect, politics of architecture,

fictional and real spaces in different cities with different groups of people (artists and non-artists). Not surprisingly, in Ciríaco's TAE process, images and sensations related to bodies in public spaces and kinesthetic perception often surfaced. Gustavo Ciríaco's process kicked off with this sentence: "Perception is a point with a hole: you fall and, while falling, things and their entanglements fall back on you." ["Perceção é um ponto com um buraco: você cai e ao cair as coisas e as suas relações caem em você."][27]

Gustavo Ciríaco's first definition of perception as falling, as a vertigo that spins the world back on the perceiver, provides an insightful understanding of the complexity of the body as both immersed and intertwined with the moving forces of the world. Perception can throw us off balance. From his felt sense, Gustavo was able to say more about the multiple and entangled dimensionality of perception. To think of perception as a point with a hole is like seeing depth on a surface. It shifts the traditional point of view to a point of feeling, an affective angle that gives the term "perception" a sense of reciprocal movement and collapses the borders between the perceiver and the thing perceived. It highlights the intricacy of the body in a situation, which is exactly where Gendlin emphasizes felt sense is located. For him, the body is "an interaction with its environment"[28] with an intricate sense of lived situations that can only be assessed by felt sense.

Ciríaco underlined "entanglements" as the keyword in this sentence. In the next step of the protocol, he replaced it with "matters" ["matérias"] and "resonances" ["ressonâncias"],[29] adding up to the discernment of his felt sense. The new words stress the materiality and vibratory quality of entanglements ("things and their matter fall back on you / things and their resonances fall back on you").[30] Thus, finding new terms, nuances, and interconnections is potentially endless, which can be a catalyst for artistic processes (exploring ideas, stage images, improvisations) as well as for research processes (exploring topics, questions, arguments) distinctively rooted in a unique felt perspective. I asked him, "Can you think of a situation you've experienced in which you felt the same kind of sensation as the one you described to be your felt sense of perception?"

> I walked next to an androgynous younger Brazilian performance artist, Nando Messias,[31] in Praça da Figueira [a central square in Lisbon] as part of his artistic residency in the city. A whole new world revealed itself to me with him by my side. The empty square reveals itself as a seabed. It is like seeing through some lens to understand: it seems like it's nothing, but everything is there. [Eu andei ao lado de um menino andrógino, Nando Messias, na Praça da Figueira, durante uma residência artística dele na cidade. Todo um mundo se revelou para mim com ele ao meu lado. A praça vazia revela-se como o fundo do mar.

> É como ver através de uns óculos para perceber: parece que não há aqui nada, mas tem lá tudo.][32]

Ciríaco was familiar with the place: a busy commuting area downtown, where a dull tourist market was being held. Strolling next to Nando Messias, Ciríaco witnessed the life lurking in the square around the monumental statue of the Portuguese king D. João I:

> There is life there: kids skateboarding, people who come to eat their lunch, someone sleeping on a doorstep, a bus stop, there are no seats, only the base of the statue. The square is a kitchen table, a place to have a birthday party; it can be hostile to women—a girl at a prostitutes' meeting point, a woman sitting by herself. The way you move makes the place move. [Existe uma vida ali: meninos de skate, quem vai almoçar, quem dorme numa porta, a paragem de autocarros, não tem bancos, só a base da estátua. A praça é uma mesa de copa, sítio onde se faz festa de aniversário; pode ser hostil para as mulheres—a moça no ponto de prostituição, uma mulher sozinha. Como você se move, você faz o lugar se mover.][33]

The shift in perception occurs not only because his focus of attention shifts differently but also due to Messias's presence. Walking next to him made the square reveal itself to Ciríaco. When I asked him whether he could extract a pattern from this instance, he picked an orange from the fruit bowl and rubbed it back and forth on the surface of the table we were sitting at: "Like an orange, the other is a force that shifts direction, redirects perception." ["Como uma laranja, o outro é uma força que desloca a direção, direciona a perceção."][34] Surely, this situation does not exhaust the meaning of perception, but it adds another layer to it that could only be articulated from Gustavo Ciríaco's felt sense. As a tool to connect with this deep and thick layer of felt experience, TAE enables the articulation of unformed meaning and intuition. Going through the process of articulating felt knowledge brings awareness to his practice as a dancer and choreographer.

Paradoxes and the Illogical

For Gendlin, paradoxical or illogical stances are the secret entrance to the surplus implicit meaning felt sense can disclose. In Ciríaco's case, the paradoxical emerges in a sequence of images of perception. The first image of a point with a hole that both disturbs and anchors our perception of a situation shifts to a "vibrating protuberance" ["protuberância que vibra"],[35] a protuberance as the concave side of a hole where matter and resonances vibrate. Finally, when interlocking three permanent key terms in a final sentence, the paradoxical

image of a "protruding abyss" ["abismo protuberante"][36] stands out: "Perception *of the* perceptive backstitch *can generate* a protruding abyss because it shows the seams, the relief, upwards and downwards, concave and convex." ["A perceção *do* pesponto percetivo *pode gerar* o abismo protuberante porque mostra as costuras, o relevo para cima e para baixo, o côncavo e o convexo."][37]

The paradoxical here unfolds in two complementary senses: perceptive backstitches "anchor reality" ["fincador de realidade"],[38] and protruding abysses activate new ways of seeing that reality. On the one hand, perception anchors reality "like the ballet barre" that supports the body or a "beach tent, the structure of which is only temporarily rigid" ["barraca da praia, que tem uma rigidez efémera"].[39] On the other hand, it can generate an insightful and ecstatic discovery of reality, an "interruption of a stream of consciousness to open another consciousness, coming to one's senses" ["interrupção de uma consciência para abrir outra consciência, um cair em si"],[40] our habits and automatic processes. Ciríaco's felt sense of a protruding abyss suggests that a shift in the supportive function of perception can disturb the sense of reality as it interrupts the stream of consciousness and activates the body in a renewed bodily state.[41]

Knowing Gustavo Ciríaco's work, I would add that his definition of perception from felt sense could also describe his engaged practices and his personal vision of the role of art and performance in the world. One of my favorite pieces is *Here While We Walk* (2006). In collaboration with Andrea Shonnberger, Ciríaco guided a group of twenty people surrounded by an elastic band looped around them on a stroll through a public space. The group walked for an hour in silence. People were asked not to take any pictures or videos. The elastic band held the group together while moving, in the same way that water spreads out and adapts to obstacles. It created an "accident": a protruding abyss that reorganized urban flow, disrupting corners, angles, and empty spaces.[42] It became a vibrating membrane that drew new lines of contact and separation between individual and collective, public and private, interrupting usual perception. This performance definitely activated a new way of seeing and relating to the city and to others.

In addition, I would like to address a peculiar tension about the methodology. As previously stated, the third phase of TAE resorts to logical exercises to interlock terms and investigate the inherent relation between them, hence using the verb "to be" is required to define A in terms of B and so on. They are never identical units however, because the experiential factor comes in to validate whether the sentence is true, always according to the person's felt sense. As soon as we reached the moment of choosing permanent terms to write a final sentence, Gustavo Ciríaco vehemently resisted the strict logical formula and required we change it both grammatically as well as inserting sentence connectors (verbs or conjunctions in italics in the sentence), instead of keeping

changes small such as using "one kind of A is B." He insisted that the use of the verb "to be" (in the formula A IS B, A IS C, B IS C) did not adequately express what he meant. At this point, I realized it made no sense to quarrel over the need to stick to the protocol. One could argue that this adulterated the outcome and jeopardized the methodology, but it was my understanding that following Ciríaco's will was more important to the abiding confidence and empowerment TAE can offer him in future practices.[43]

Finally, at the very end of the third phase, I asked Gustavo Ciríaco to apply the final sentence of interlocked key terms outside his field of expertise. Not surprisingly, Gustavo applied it to urbanism. Can city development and planning be seen through the lens of a theory of perception as both anchor and interruption of reality? Ciríaco asked, "What would it be like if a roundabout in the city center became a huge hole?" ["Como seria se, numa rotunda meio da cidade, surgisse um buraco enorme?"][44] Like perception, suggested Gustavo Ciríaco, "urbanism is continuous; it is a mode of organizing city flows, according to a plan of the commons" ["urbanismo é contínuo; impõe um modo de fluir a cidade; ele é a ideia de um plano de organização do comum"].[45] However, unlike perception, it does not create holes: "A protruding abyss would be to create spaces that provoke accidents: what would a building that goes up and down be like?" ["O abismo protuberante seria criar espaços que provocassem o acidente: o que seria um prédio que sobe e que desce?"] He continued, "urbanism is continuity and organization, which can interrupt the stream of consciousness and create a protruding abyss; when you create something that forces flow to reorganize itself." ["Urbanismo é continuidade e organização, que pode interromper a consciência e criar um abismo protuberante; quando você cria algo que faz com que o fluxo continue a fluir mas que tenha de se reorganizar."][46] In other words, perception is a threshold into the multiple layers of the reality around us. Ciríaco wondered about the perceptive possibilities of an urban planning that would disrupt the plan, creating the "possibility for each inhabitant to fill in the gaps" ["possibilidade de deixar espaço para cada morador preencher"][47] with a heightened awareness of the here-and-now.

A Tool for Discovery and Reconnection

I argued at the beginning of this article that research on affect lacked a specific technique to engage with the affective realm of performance practices and suggested TAE as a resourceful methodology to support both artistic work and academic research. I have presented the findings of the theatre-maker Miguel Fragata and of the performer and choreographer Gustavo Ciríaco, whose TAE processes I accompanied. They expanded their definitions of communication and perception, respectively, raising new questions for further research. These new issues have become available for both the artists, if they wish to pursue

their theories, take their findings to the studio, or write new dramatic texts, and researchers, who can draw on and from the expanded notions of communication and perception.

Sharing their processes enabled me to introduce the overall TAE protocol and not just discuss its methodological relevance but also highlight the advantages of working from a felt sense. The vivid sensorial material performers were able to articulate once they had tapped into their felt sense shows how fertile and inspiring this deeper layer of tacit knowledge can be for artists. The vastness of such unmapped territory is mind-blowing. In fact, TAE surprises everyone who goes through the process, and here I speak from my experience as a companion and my own TAE process during the course I took with Focusing Trainer Hanspeter Mühlethaler in 2016. TAE pushes intuition to a palpable materiality that allows the right words to express implicit meanings stored in the body. Becoming familiar with this place in ourselves is the most exciting and challenging part of the process. Staying with felt sense can easily turn into tension and anxiety if we do not feel or sense what we expect to or what we think we are supposed to. Conversely, we might lose ourselves in mental elaborations about what we believe to know or feel about the topic. I have witnessed this on many occasions with different performers I have accompanied. The most effective way to shut down mental activity was asking them to close their eyes and relax. This simple, almost prosaic trick helps release the body and disconnect us from the forcefully active, productive, everyday life mindset.

Likewise, the choice of specific lived situations is as unpredictable as it is random because there are no rational criteria. Instead, it is the felt sense of the term that chooses situations for us, some of which would not even remotely enter our minds otherwise. I cannot emphasize enough the distinctively fundamental aspect of felt sense in this work and its importance for research on affect. Felt sense is meaning yet to be formed. It is a source of intertwined insights available to anyone who wishes to investigate through deep listening to the body. Starting artistic or academic research from a felt sense sets one off on an exciting and surprising journey since getting ourselves in touch with this vibrating multilayered and unique fabric leads us to singular articulations of ideas. Again, this is not about originality, and it does not exclude culture signification from the process; rather it is about enabling people to say what they already know but could not say before, even if affective experience is necessarily mediated by culture, in this case, Portuguese and Brazilian cultures. TAE is a tool for finding awareness of experience and a confident attitude that empowers people to articulate what is actually meaningful to them, which then contributes to a democratic sharing of perspectives, ideas, and visions of what is important to a life worth living together.

A source of inspiration and motivation for all the performers whose processes I have accompanied (not just for this article), TAE raises awareness

of the performer's unique sensibility and understanding of particular terms that cannot be articulated unless one listens to felt experience. As an affective methodology, TAE fosters a challenging path to investigate felt experience since the way it unfolds is rich in surprise and discovery, stimulating both creativity and reflection. As the reported processes show for themselves, this methodology not only fosters the articulation of singular artistic voices about specific themes relevant to performance but also empowers artists by sharpening their contact with their own embodied knowledge.

More than one year after they went through the process, I asked Gustavo Ciríaco and Miguel Fragata what was left of this experience. Their feedback was incredibly positive. Gustavo Ciríaco emphasized how much he felt in tune with TAE's purpose of validating felt knowledge as a "more tangible and accountable artistic contribution to human knowledge."[48] He also claimed that felt sense "shed a new light on key aspects of his practice and artistic research."[49] Miguel Fragata was caught up in the process of putting together a show that had not premiered because of the national COVID 19 pandemic lockdown, which started days before the opening night. When I talked to him, he confided how hard it was getting back to a performance that had been cancelled in such a traumatic context. He was making an extra effort to ensure everyone would not be dragged into the hovering pessimistic mood that was haunting all performing arts creators at that time. Yet he was happy to tell me how TAE resurfaced in this process, along with the restaging of two older performances to be touring internationally, as a handy tool to reconnect with the original sensations (in the body, in the text) and help him find a fresh way of doing the performance again (and yet for the first time). Despite following a loose version of the protocol, Miguel Fragata emphasized the importance of the tool to tune into an inner space, a "state," he said, that enabled him to reconnect with original sensations in the show, particularly "to find a new emotional engagement with it"[50]:

> Since we shared the experience of TAE, I have not thought about it. Only recently when I have had to restage two performances, which I am directing and participating in as an actor as well, did I remember the methodology. The need to dive into the text of the performances and reclaim almost forgotten sensations made me realize that an approach like TAE could help rescue my much-needed bodily memory of the performance. And I did this, in a simpler version, mainly to get into a state of feeling that is helpful for finding sensations and opening new possibilities. It was an opportunity to delve within the material through a new bodily perspective and expand on the meaning of words and ideas, questioning them in the light of a bodily memory. I am sure I will often get back to this kind of methodology in my artistic work, especially when working as an actor and director simultaneously, for it helps me find a

balance between the opposite forces at play. In these haunted times, with the constant threat of performances being cancelled, having a resource like TAE is especially fortunate. All weapons are useful when we need to redefine concepts and rediscover the artistic process. All weapons are useful, but this seems to be an especially well-equipped one to help us change focus, to leave behind a dark place and find a luminous new zone in ourselves.[51]

Notes

1. Eugene Gendlin, "The Primacy of the Body, Not the Primacy of Perception," *Man and World* 25, no. 3–4 (October 1992): 346–47.
2. Eugene Gendlin, Beyond Words: The Implicit, interview by Lynn Preston, Video, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k25EsOCv7k4.
3. Timm Knudsen, Britta, and Carsten Stage, eds., *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
4. Pierre Vermersch, *L'entretien d'explicitation* (Paris: ESF Éditeur, 1994).
5. Anne Cazemajou, "L'explicitation comme pédagogie phénoménologique et support de créativité en danse," in *L'entretien d'explicitation: usages diversifiés en recherche et en formation*, ed. Alain Mouchet (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), 231–50.
6. Miguel Fragata's TAE process took place in Lisbon from January 4 to February 1, 2019. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are taken from my notes and his writings in each session.
7. Miguel Fragata, Thinking at the Edge Process Interview, interview by Ana Pais, January 4, 2019.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Fragata, Thinking at the Edge, January 8, 2019.
13. Fragata, Thinking at the Edge, January 4, 2019.
14. Fragata, Thinking at the Edge, January 8, 2019.
15. More info about the performances at http://formiga-atomica.com/espetaculos.
16. Fragata, Thinking at the Edge, January 8, 2019.
17. Fragata, Thinking at the Edge, February 1, 2019.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Fragata, Thinking at the Edge, January 8, 2019.
21. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).
22. Fragata, Thinking at the Edge, January 8, 2019.

23. Gustavo Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge Process Interview, interview by Ana Pais, July 19, 2018.
24. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, July 19, 2018.
25. Gustavo Ciríaco's TAE process took place in Lisbon from June 7 to July 31, 2019. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are taken from my notes and his writings in each session.
26. See http://gustavociria.co/en/.
27. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, June 7, 2018.
28. Gendlin, "The Primacy of the Body," 349.
29. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, June 7, 2018.
30. Ibid.
31. See http://www.nandomessias.com.
32. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, June 7, 2018.
33. Ibid.
34. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, July 26, 2018.
35. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, July 19, 2018.
36. Ibid.
37. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, July 31, 2018.
38. Ibid.
39. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, July 19, 2018.
40. Ibid.
41. In the session when the image of a protruding abyss came to the fore, Ciríaco recalled a pivotal moment in his formative years. After an accident that led him to a slow recovery before being able to bend his leg again, Gustavo Ciríaco sat in his modern dance classes, in Rio de Janeiro in 1994, and for six months he systematically observed. This was game changing for the way he understood movement.
42. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, July 31, 2018.
43. Eugene Gendlin, "Introduction to Thinking at the Edge," *The Folio* 19, no. 1 (2004): 1–8. Gendlin himself admits that most of his students at the University of Chicago did not really create a new theory. Nevertheless, the process was always described as fulfilling, exciting, and empowering.
44. Ciríaco, Thinking at the Edge, July 31, 2018.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Gustavo Ciríaco, email correspondence to the author, October 1, 2020.
49. Gustavo Ciríaco, email correspondence to the author, October 1, 2020.
50. Miguel Fragata, email correspondence to the author, November 2, 2020.
51. Miguel Fragata, email correspondence to the author, November 2, 2020.

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