

The body of presence: sensing bodily processes in the present moment of an analytic encounter

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ABSTRACT. – The space-time of the analytic encounter serves as the framework for this contribution: the experience of a single session becomes a threshold through which to approach feeling, bodily processes, and states of consciousness. The inquiry focuses on a quality of presence rooted in interoception, neuroception, and somatic listening: a mode of attunement that engages with significant frequencies, orienting the predictive system while remaining open to its suspension. It is in this suspension that the potential for embodied creativity and consistency emerges. The analytic meeting radically exposes the partiality of perspectives and the complex interplay of the variables involved, as lived by both patient and analyst. That unique encounter, between those particular subjects, is not merely an event, but a holographic expression of complexity: analyst and patient together on the threshold, listening, resonating, opening to the experience of vocality. This gives rise to essential questions: What kind of presence unfolds as we inhabit the affective hypothesis of sensing and perceiving trust and flexibility? What possibilities arise when presence becomes permeable to bodily felt experience? And what impact does this have on the subject's capacity to embody consistency and creative agency in the ongoing becoming of the I-subject?

Key words: presence, I-Subject, creativity, *unitas multiplex*, interoception, neuroception.

*A bird does not sing
because it has an answer.
It sings because it has a song.*
Anonymous

*Those who do not hope for what seems unhopeable
will never discover its reality,
for by not hoping, they turn it
into something that cannot be found, and to which no path leads.*
Heraclitus

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Concepts create idols; only wonder truly knows.

Gregory of Nyssa

Knowledge is the knowledge of the operations that make knowledge possible.

E. Morin, *Knowledge of Knowledge*, 1986

Clinical case presentation

I first come into contact with Federico's existence while having a coffee: a colleague writes to me about a young man he can't meet due to a lack of availability. I have space, and a few days later I receive his call: "Good morning, doctor. My body saved me. Now I'm afraid it might explode."

We arrange time and place, a specific configuration of particles inscribed within the field of possibilities. I make a proposal, and he agrees without hesitation; his tone is firm, his voice deep, although to my ear the body of his voice rests upon a high breath. I end the call and notice a subtle chill in my hands. What does this coldness say about me, about the interaction with him? On the day of the appointment, I give myself time before our meeting: I connect to my breath, begin to listen to it. After a couple of inhalations and exhalations, I find connection with the variability of my heart rate. It gives me calm, a sense of groundedness, in the body, with the body. Outside the window, the tree canopies are thick, summer life at the peak of its unfolding. A postural suggestion crosses my mind: *without memory and without desire*. My clinical practice is still young, and I am drawn to the idea of staying open, both to memory and desire, and to their absence. Does this indication concern me, Federico, us? The intercom rings ten minutes earlier than the time we had agreed upon. Here and now, as I recall it while writing this contribution, I feel the echo of disorientation and surprise, a slight numbness, the need for a deeper breath. So I bring my attention to the breath, to my heartbeat and its rhythm, and I find space to meet. The doorbell rings, I open the door: the smile of the tall, lean, muscular young man before me aligns with mine; I believe I am responding to his. In the handshake we exchange at the entrance, I sense a kind of dance, a core of us, particles *entangled* in mutual influence, perhaps already since the phone call, renewed now in the present contact between two palms. How is Federico? And how am I? I take in his blue eyes, the way they harmonize with the rest of his face and body, like entries in a somatic language. I observe them, nearly still, within a dynamic bodily whole. He apologizes for arriving early, which helps dissolve the sense of dissonance and displacement I had felt. Attention and curiosity emerge. "I was expecting you", I reply. As we settle into the room, I notice my breath feels suspended. I try to welcome it with an inhalation, and on the exhale, I offer Federico a word of welcome. I observe his own breathing rhythm; there's a subtle movement only at the level

of his clavicles, and his complexion appears pale. I have no basis for comparison. What is it usually like? I ask what brings him here today, and feel that the question opens a new frame, marking a time of waiting and silence. The curiosity I felt a moment before returns: what is Federico grappling with in this season of his life?

We spend a few minutes in silence. I observe him for a while, then shift my gaze and return to my breath; the rhythm is slower. I choose to support this slowing down, as Federico settles into the armchair, and our eyes meet a couple of times in a smile softer than the one we exchanged at the door. I give voice to the idea that many things can happen in silence, for example, orienting oneself to a new environment, a new encounter. Perhaps this is what's happening between us, too. Federico's pupils show a slight constriction. I ask whether something in the room has caught his attention, and if he feels like sharing it. He looks around, and as he does, his posture softens further. After a moment, he says, "I like the orange wall". He pauses. "I don't know if I'll come back another time. I just needed one session, and that's what I'd like to do". As I hear these words and the firmness with which he speaks them, my breath falters a little, and I feel the echo of distance. I know it says something about me. Through the breath, I try to hold this feeling, the thought that I may have done something wrong, or that I am not doing what is needed. Welcoming creates space again. I feel a desire to take Federico seriously, to be with him. I ask him to confirm his intention for a single session and thank him for sharing it, if it's something that feels important to him. He looks at me and nods. His tone grows warmer as he adds that he thinks this is enough, that he has no "head problems", and prefers to decide for himself how to proceed. I feel that with Federico, I am in a dance, between what is possible for him of me, and for me of him, in this one meeting. As his question gives rise to curiosity, I too relax into the armchair. Another specific configuration of particles, in time and space. I respond that we can work together in this encounter, I can listen to what brings him to my office, including the awareness that he may never return. I recall our phone call, the fear that his body might explode; I associate with our interaction the idea that micro-detonations might be taking place, perhaps disarming rather than destructive. I welcome the warlike atmosphere this evokes. I tell Federico I am thinking back to our conversation and ask how he feels in his body: whether there is anything like an explosion, or whether he feels saved, or neither of these, something else entirely. Federico settles further into the armchair, his elbows resting on the side cushions. He says he came because he wants to start singing, but something is blocking him. "Can you help me?". The discomfort evoked by his earlier request for a single session softens further, and I feel able to stay with the content of his request, to listen to the unfolding of interpersonal attunement between us, to play with what is present. I ask Federico if he would like to try singing together like this: he makes a sound, then I respond with another, and so on, let's see how it goes. He looks at me, his eyes widen slightly,

we seem to share a certain surprise at the proposal. After a few breaths that seem to carry thought, he smiles and says it's fine. We take turns for several minutes in vocal expression; we begin with short, almost spoken sounds, gradually evolving, improvising in melody and duration. We touch different volumes, traverse various soundscapes. One moment stays with me: he emits a very low tone, and I find myself responding with a high-pitched one. We remain in this sonic exchange that, for me, takes on a tangible quality of closeness, a prelude to intimacy. I settle into the musical flow and the pleasure of being in the vocality. Returning to Federico's eyes anchors me again in the present of our analytic meeting, in the process that is unfolding. The tension around his eyes softens, revealing a harmony more aligned with the rest of his bodily dynamism. And my own eyes? We share this embodied movement, each on our own chair, until we find ourselves emitting sounds together. As it happens, I sense a sudden shift in the quality of the atmosphere, contact with the rigid spaces of my spine. I receive the thought: "Be careful". Something shifts for him as well. We are swinging. The improvisation comes to a stop. The breath has dropped to the diaphragm, for both of us. Federico and I remain silent for a few minutes. When I see his gaze lower and his torso collapse slightly into the chair, I ask what he feels in his body. He raises his gaze, his eyes fill with tears, and he says he feels warmth in his chest. He places his hand over his heart and adds, "Sadness, a lot of sadness." I return to my breath, inhale, exhale, and tell him that sadness can help in asking for help. I ask, "What would those tears say if they could speak?" "I don't know", he replies. Composed tears roll down his cheeks. We remain in silence, not for long, then he says, "Maybe they would ask for help". Hearing Federico say these words brings me back to the premises of our encounter, the time frame of a single session. I ask him how it feels to stay with what is happening. As if he had anticipated the question, he answers quickly that he hasn't cried in a long time and that later in the afternoon, he will call the singing teacher to start lessons. He felt his voice was capable, he enjoyed the improvisation, he wants to try. I ask him again how he feels about telling me this. He says something feels like it has softened in his chest. After a moment of inner listening, he continues, saying he doesn't want to let his mother win, with her telling him he would never amount to anything. I think and feel in my heart that before me is humanity, strength, delicacy, sharpness, mystery. I recognize and feel them in myself too, as I resonate with a sensation of anger evoked by his words. I'd like to ask how he feels, but I refrain. There is little time left in our session. I tell him that we've begun to get to know each other, and that I am open to the possibility of not seeing each other again. I share with Federico that if something unexpected should open up after this meeting and he wants to reach out, I am here, and we can try to listen together to whatever is present and will emerge: sensations, desires, something that does not yet have words or that speaks in and through the body. Federico thanks me. He says he doesn't know,

and for now, this feels right, many things have happened. I nod. Then we both stand. I offer my hand, and he takes it. I'm struck by the quality of presence in his blue eyes, now. I walk him to the door. I close it behind him. How am I? Breath, contact, heartbeat. Inhale, exhale, presence.

Epistemological-theoretical-clinical references

*Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space lies our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.*
Viktor Frankl

I return to epistemological and theoretical reflection starting from the clinical narrative, with the intention of exploring a recursive and interdependent movement between experience and concepts. The hypothesis of a felt sense intertwined with interpretative concepts of bodily experience leads, in this context, to the use of certain theoretical lenses, intended as hypotheses of possible perspectives for reading the unfolding of the narrated analytic encounter. These are suggestions, interests, stimuli, and opportunities for resonance, like tuning forks vibrating at identical or similar frequencies.¹

What is the quality of the experience of presence as consistency? At the heart of what is possible to propose within the limits of this article, I place the hypothesis of an interweaving of trust and embodiment and turn to examine certain concepts: interoception, neuroception, somatic listening. The intended exploration is aimed at nourishing a qualitative perspective on the experience of bodily feeling, in a clinical positioning oriented toward creativity and presence (Minolli, 2015). I frame embodiment through the lens of the theoretical-informational approach proposed by Faggin (2020), which posits that the sensory-brain system functions similarly to a computer: through perceptual processes, it provides informational content that is then elaborated within the inner subjective space defined as consciousness, where it is converted into qualia (physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, spiritual feelings) and the meaning they carry. This model is based on an axiom not yet recognized by physics, that consciousness is “a fundamental property of quantum fields”.² According to this axiom, everything that exists results from the interaction and combination of conscious elementary entities called units of consciousness (UC), whose consciousness derives from a “something” called the *nousym* (*nous* = mind, intellect; *sym* = symbol).

¹ <http://patrimonio-didattico.fisica.unipd.it/esperimento.php?esperimento=30>

² Canessa, E., Faggin, F. (2020). Consciousness and Creativity: Federico Faggin's Notes, p. 34.

In subjective experience, mediated by the sensory-brain system, the conversion from symbols to qualia is called perception; the conversion from qualia to meaning is called understanding.

The fundamental principle of this model is that reality is produced from a fundamental need: the need and will of the *nousym* to know itself. According to this framework, each UC thus represents a point of view through which the *nousym* knows itself, driven by the irreducible properties of awareness and free will. In this model, the body is understood as a symbol of the broader reality of which we are part and is controlled by the ego, which is a part of consciousness interfacing with the physical world. Faggin argues that the human essence is vaster than what is governed by the ego, and that it can only be experienced by overcoming identification with the physical body, that is, the belief in being merely a physical entity separate from others and from the universe. The progressive disidentification from the physical body thus supports the exploration of the distinctive depth of the human dimension.

Returning the reflection to the clinical field, I offer some hypotheses of resonance. Bernstein *et al.* (2015) describe the concept of disidentification as the metacognitive capacity to adopt an external perspective on one's own subjective experience, observing it as a phenomenon distinct from the self. This movement of disidentification, in the positive conception of the I-Subject, and in the hypothesis that the movement of consciousness of consciousness and presence to oneself is an expression of the being and becoming of that I-Subject and its creativity (Minolli, 2015), raises the following question: what kind of stance can facilitate the imponderable choice of that I-Subject to speak its destiny? With reference to embodiment, could the experience of perceiving oneself from an external perspective, through notions such as interoception and neuroception, be considered a significant variable? In what way might the act of speaking to oneself, of being and becoming that I-as-Subject, find its roots in the contact with the entries of somatic language? Can the possibility of affective contact in the experience of embodiment support a process of open receptivity toward the self, the environment, and others, toward one's own historical configuration (Minolli, 2015), toward self-eco-organization processes, and thus toward consciousness as a relativizable perspective, in the act of returning to oneself and one's own life story? Might the movement between the level of consciousness and the level of consciousness-of-consciousness (Minolli, 2015) be connected to the processes of perception and understanding, as proposed by Faggin, and to the activations of the autonomic nervous system (Porges, 2021), and the contact with the felt sense (Gendlin, 1996)? Could a somatic analogue of the movement of returning to oneself be situated in the possible alternation, in the pendulation, between different states of autonomic activation mediated by the ventral and dorsal branches of the vagus nerve and the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system (Payne *et al.*, 2015)?

The experience with Federico marks the field in a radical way: one session, a sharp delimitation of the beginning and end of explicit contact between our embodied presences. A field of delimitation that may resonate as a hologram of a complex whole (Morin, 2005), and for this very reason may offer a space of resonance with the critical transition between the experience of consciousness and of consciousness-of-consciousness that contact with mortality can evoke (Minolli, 2015). The therapeutic choice to carry out the session by taking Federico's statement seriously and working with an observational lens stripped of the idealization of magical or resolute power over his suffering, intended instead to support the process of contact with the mortal dimension of existence, became the foundation for aligning myself with the themes he brought: the desire to sing, the struggle to sing, the possibility of doing so together. I would like to briefly examine the impact of shared vocalization, hypothesizing, based on the outcomes expressed at the close of the session, that this practice resonated, for both Federico and myself, with affective experiences. Concerning the affective dimension, Solms and Friston (2018) propose a taxonomy of consciousness articulated across three levels: one affective and interoceptive in nature; one perceptual, related to exteroception; and one cognitive, characterized by a more abstract quality. The authors affirm that the emergence of affective consciousness occurs in relation to visceral and enterceptive events. At the clinical level, does attunement with interoceptive events intertwine with the experience of affectivity? Might the act of listening to and sensing the resonance of these events, and recognizing certain autonomic responses as constitutive of one's personal history, level of consciousness, and configuration shaped by genetics and environment (Minolli, 2015), support the awareness and subjective experience of the irreducibility of the human being to machines, and thus to Artificial Intelligence? And might it be precisely in the act of returning to oneself (Minolli, 2015) that the dimensions of intuition and creativity (Faggin, 2020; Minolli, 2015) are affirmed? Regarding the affective dimension, Stern (2004) speaks of *vital affects* to describe those subjectively perceived variations in internal emotional states that follow the temporal rhythm of stimuli. These are subtle but deeply felt modulations that shape the lived quality of each experience. Damasio and Carvalho (2021) define the interoceptive nervous system as a complex network of neural structures, from the nerves and ganglia of the peripheral nervous system to the nuclei and pathways of the central nervous system, constantly mapping the organism's physiological changes. De Preester (2016) broadens this framework, highlighting how interoception is not limited to passive monitoring but acts as an active and predictive bridge between body and mind, contributing significantly to affective elaboration and the construction of subjectivity.

During the session with Federico, I clearly perceived signals arising from my body: a breath that slowed down, and a subtle vibration flowing through

me in response to something alive in the encounter. From this connection to my transforming physiology, recognized as an interoceptive signal, I allowed myself to be touched by the possibility of authentic affective contact. In that space, where the body's felt sense revealed its own entries, I perceived an echo: a resonance between my experience and Federico's, as if we had entered a shared zone, inhabited by a silent and profound consciousness, connected to the *bios* as an organizing principle of living beings (Coin, 2024), which moves us. In that moment, I felt the complexity of life not as an abstract concept, but as a real presence manifesting through the relationship. When, during our phone call, Federico began to speak to me about his body, I symbolized his discourse as a return to vivid contact with the *Multiplex*, understood as the articulated dimension of his embodiment, the way he looks at his body, and the experiences that arise from that gaze, which, according to Morin's (2002) definition, contributes to delineating his *Unitas*. I experienced that moment as an access point to relational contact, a possible opening toward a shared space of epistemic exploration (D'Ariano & Faggin, 2022), where the body becomes epistemological terrain to be explored together. I interpret what occurred in the encounter as the possible activation of a referential process (Bucci *et al.*, 2015), in which subsymbolic elements, bodily sensations, tensions, visceral shifts, begin to connect with symbolic forms: words, images, affective tones. During the shared vocalization, I perceived the reciprocity of an episode of visceral and autonomic arousal, and I hypothesize that in that moment, a critical possibility was opening up: the possibility of giving voice to, and symbolizing through song, emotions and sensations. This seemed to me a gateway to embodied knowledge, a way of inhabiting the experiential field together. Writing this contribution nourishes reflection and helps open questions about how to anchor theoretical thinking in listening to the body. I ask myself how safe Federico felt, and how safe I felt in meeting him. I recognize my intention to support a field of listening and relational safety. In this sense, the concept of *neuroception*, proposed by Porges (2022), offers a valuable key: understood as an unconscious reflex that constantly evaluates the safety or threat of the environment, neuroception modulates physiological responses instantly. According to polyvagal theory, physiological state is not merely a correlate of emotion but a constituent of it. In resonance with this view, Corcoran and Hohwy (2019) emphasize that *allostasis*, unlike homeostasis, which is reactive, operates in a proactive and predictive manner, leveraging interoceptive processes. In this framework, interoception and neuroception become fundamental tools by which the organism constructs internal models capable of anticipating future physiological needs, thereby enabling more adaptive responses both internally and relationally. Can accessing these levels support the creative process – the construction of a space in which the reactivity of the conscious level and the repetitive affirmation of one's historical configuration may be softened (Coin, 2024; Minolli, 2015)? In the shared field with Federico,

I wonder whether a quality of presence was nurtured, perhaps a compass in the perception of autonomic safety, flexibility, and trust, felt as characteristics of fertile ground in which expected predictions in the recursion of interaction might be disrupted. What happened in the moment when Federico's tears emerged, just after we sang together, when I felt willing and able to welcome them, and he, after a long time, found himself crying? Taking seriously his statement about wanting just one session made me even more sensitive to the centrality of nonverbal communication: the gaze, the tone of voice. I felt, in line with Porges (2022), that the neural connection between face, voice, and cardiac activity, as measurable through HRV (heart rate variability), represents a portal for neural regulation through social engagement. In this light, the moment of shared singing took on even greater meaning. Ruiz-Blais *et al.* (2020) affirm that the HRV of people singing together tends to synchronize. This idea resonated with me as I experienced, with surprise and a sense of wonder, the possibility of vocalizing with Federico in a playful, almost childlike form. When our voices overlapped and we sensed a closer sonic proximity, I hypothesized that a subsymbolic flow was being activated, a still preverbal dimension of experience that, given a broader space-time, might evolve into symbolic forms, a process dynamic, and a therapeutic articulation of content. Reflecting now on the variation of rhythms in our singing and the quality of intersubjective attunement (Bolis *et al.*, 2022), I feel I contacted a holographic configuration of the complexity of experience (Morin, 2005), resonating with emotional (Bucci, 2021) and affective-bodily schemas (Downing, 1995) previously learned. As we approached the end of the session, I felt an urgency to give shape and meaning to what was emerging: a passage, subtle yet dense, that manifested through a change in communicative code, a shift in the intersubjective field: the tears, the space to hold them, the vibration of our shared humanity. In that moment, I intuited, following the work of Allison and Rossouw (2013), Schore (2012), and Siegel (2012), the possibility of a bidirectional communication between our right hemispheres, supporting more adaptive relational functioning, where the act of singing opened the space for emotional expression. It seemed to me that a process of pendulation, as described by Payne *et al.* (2015), was taking place: an oscillation between activation and deactivation of the autonomic nervous system, allowing Federico, and myself, in interaction with him, to gradually face his arousal states. This gradual approach to emotions and bodily sensations reminded me of Gendlin's description of the micro-process of finding the "right distance" from one's felt sense (in Leijssen, 1998). Our work during the session seemed to consist of supporting the possibility of staying, with respect for limits: between muscular tension and emotional experience, between constricted breath, words, and possible emotions. A process aimed at fostering a growing sense of presence of what was happening. In the interplay between neuroception and pendulation, in the curiosity of approaching bodily

experiences, of sensing and moving through them, I hypothesize the transition toward a possible experience of disidentification, a potential prerequisite for returning to oneself, for orienting toward the construction of one's own existential horizon (Minolli, 2015). Federico's willingness to stay in contact with his somatic dimension and to grant it flexibility through the shared singing, as both content and defined container within that single encounter between him and me, seemed to me a gesture of care toward himself and, at the same time, an authentic movement toward our meeting. Here and now, a part of me wonders whether Federico will return to the office, and tries to welcome the gift held in the possibility that we met. I do not deny that it would be beautiful to see him again, and as I did when I said goodbye to him, I try to breathe into this feeling. I feel and know how deeply this encounter marked an important step in my own process of discovery and growth. I cannot say for him, in the absence of further words during our encounter. And yet, this importance opens in the space of radical recognition of Federico's uniqueness. Meeting him was, once again, an occasion to cross through the process of living and returning to the movement of sensing, reflecting, hypothesizing, and constructing a sense of self. The play of sound, the release of tears, I believe, helped us cultivate a space of presence to the shared humanity that binds us, to what is, and to what becomes, as we move through the lightness and depths of the precious human experience that the analytic encounter can offer.

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